Circumstantial

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Circumstantial

by stfulecter

Summary

“You’re now accusing me of being another killer? Your manners are lacking, Dear William.”

“I have no evidence or authority to bring you in for anything, Dr. Lecter. I’m not going to risk it after where it got me before. You would just pack up and leave. Maybe sue me with a posh lawyer in the process.”

Hannibal tilts his head ever so slightly and his eyes lose their humor, “Are you here to find evidence?”

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Will Graham, a young Italian police officer, finds Hannibal Lecter sitting in front of the Primavera after a killing of a couple was found. With confidence, Will knows Hannibal is the one they call Il Mostro, but he can’t prove it. Hannibal is let go.

Over a decade passes and fate decides to bring them together in Baltimore through the killings of the Chesapeake Ripper. Will is sent into a frustrating journey of hitting constant road blocks when attempting to find concrete evidence on Hannibal. The word circumstantial haunts his dreams.

Notes

This is the first fanfic I’ve published in years. Please feel free to comment writing suggestions. You can be direct but don’t be rude. You know what happens to those who are rude…

I hope you enjoy and stick around till the end! Two of my favorite chapters are 10 and 15.

Chapter 1

The bodies lay peacefully amongst the flowers and vines. Their skin is deathly pale, creating a lighter accent to the display. They rest on top of fabric while being wrapped in translucent gowns. One is light orange and the other is gray. The two's hair matches their clothing. No doubt on purpose. Eyes open, they face one another. In a slight embrace, the two blossom with the theme of transformation and love. A truly beautiful presentation. It's a shame that it's a murdered man and woman in the back of a truck found in some random alley.

"Graham, got any ideas?" A cop asks a young curly-headed detective.

He drags his hand through his hair and sighs, "Whoever did this wanted to create something beautiful. Something that will secure its place in time. He did it for the sake of art. No care over the consequences— It's a real-life replica of Botticelli's Primavera."

"So we have a murderous wannabe Botticelli?" The cop responds.

Will Graham laughs, "No, no. He is not trying to be Botticelli. He's expressing appreciation for Botticelli and believes he's elevating it to a new plane. His plane."

The cop rubs his beard and motions to the forensics team, "Get them back to the lab and see if you can get anything off the bodies."

A group of people come over to the bodies and begin preparing them for transport. Will steps to the side with the officer. The man tells Will to go back to the office and write down his report, then he's free to go home.

"This is your first case like this, kid. It might not seem like much right now but it'll haunt you later. Go have the afternoon to yourself," The older man suggests.

Will nods and walks back to the station. His report doesn't take too long so he's out before the sun sets. Even though he's grateful for the afternoon off, Will is now bothered with how to spend it. He doesn't have many friends. The older guys at the station are friendly enough since he's young, but he has no one outside of work.

He makes sure to turn in his report to his superior before leaving. As he walks out, he takes a few minutes to stroll the streets of Florence. Aimlessly, he goes, taking in the sun. His contemplation is soon halted when he sees the Uffizi Gallery in the distance. He supposes seeing the Primavera in person could help him get a better understanding of what attracted the killer to it.

Will walks over to the gallery. He makes his way to the check in. The cashier asks if it's just him and he nods. He pays the price for a full ticket, no tour. She reminds him, "The gallery closes in an hour."

Will nods and takes a map off the front desk. He locates what section of the gallery the Primavera is displayed in. By this time of the afternoon, the gallery is practically empty. There are a few visitors but they are spread out amongst the exhibits. With each step, the heels of Will's shoes click against the floor, breaking the silent air.

He approaches the room where the Primavera hangs on the wall of the Uffizi Gallery. The room lighting is dim but there are lights that shine a careful light upon the Primavera. It creates an almost glowing effect to the painting. Will at first glance is not too in awe of the painting. Mainly due to his attention being drawn elsewhere.

In the center of the room is a bench. Sitting there, drawing, is another man, a couple of years older than Will. Immediately, Will feels a mental shift and his body is alerted. Any survival instinct he has warns him of stepping inside the room. This only makes him eager to understand why.

Will steps inside the room and takes a seat at the bench, beside the man. He glances over at the man's drawing. It's a sketched replica of the Primavera, but only the right-hand section.

"Fan of Botticelli?" Will asks.

"His depictions of life are so vivid and full of details, one can feel exactly what warmth he conveys. It's remarkable," The man replies with a foreign accent, never looking up.

"Is the Primavera your favorite?"

"I wouldn't classify any of Botticelli's paintings as my favorite."

Will looks up the Primavera, taking into memory the details. His eyes travel to the right side of the painting where the murder was inspired from. He closes his eyes and all he can see is the murder from earlier. Staining the back of his eyelids are the two bodies. Though gruesome, it's beautiful.

"Ever think about turning your sketches into something more lifelike?"

The man stops drawing and for the first time looks at Will. He closes his drawing pad and holds his pencil in his hand.

"How do you mean?" He asks.

"How do you think I mean?"

There's a slight rise of the man's top lip, holding back a scoff of irritation.

Will looks over at the man, "Might you be available for police questioning in regards to a recent murder?"

"On what grounds would you have to question me?"

"Your interest in the Primavera."

The man slowly spins the pencil in between his fingers, keeping eye contact with Will. His face is expressionless and his eyes are dark voids. He doesn't speak for a moment. In a controlled, thought-out manner, the man softly smiles. He replies, "I'd be glad to assist the police in any way I can."

At this moment, Will knew that he wouldn't get anything out of the man in front of him. He understood at that moment this man was organized and would never allow something to slip by his watch that could lead to his incrimination. The man in front of him is a monster on his way to wreak havoc on the world.

The two walk together to the police station. While walking, Will calls his superior to let him know he's bringing someone in for questioning. The two men don't speak to one another, rather just walk in silence.

When they get to the station, Will transports the man to an interrogation room. He gets the man's name and reads off any rights he has before they proceed. Will takes the seat across from the man and begins, "Mr. Lecter, where were you around midnight this morning?"

"At home, asleep like most of Florence."

"Do you have anyone to confirm that?" Will asks.

"No, I do not," Hannibal crosses his legs and keeps continuous eye contact with Will, "Aren't you a bit young to be an officer?"

"Would you be willing for us to document your fingerprints?"

"Anything I can do to help. Would you like to examine my home?" Hannibal offers.

Will nods, "Yeah, that would be nice."

Will gathers a fingerprinting set and opens it up for it to be used. He walks over to Hannibal's side of the table and gently grabs Hannibal's wrist. Carefully, he presses each finger of Hannibal's down to get his print. This time, Hannibal genuinely smirks while Will holds his hand. Will notices but doesn't say anything. Though, there's a slight roll of his eyes.

Afterward, he gives Hannibal a cleaning wipe to get the ink off. Hannibal thanks him and cleans his hand. Will takes his seat once more. He opens up a file that's sitting on the table and pulls out the crime scene photos. He sets them in front of Hannibal and watches his expressions. There's zero change even in the details of his face, which tells Will more than if he reacted.

Hannibal takes a glance at the images and up at Will, "So this is what you meant by something more lifelike."

Will nods.

Hannibal looks back down. He pulls one of the pictures closer and says, "Horrible thing, but I can't help but see the beauty of the tableau. It's remarkable how exact the details are. Must've taken quite a lot of thought."

He slides the picture back and returns to looking at Will, “I do wish I could help, but I didn’t commit this crime. I sincerely hope you catch whoever did, however.”

Will stares at him unamused.

“I thank you for your sincerity,” he clicks a pen, “Now, what’s your address?”

Hannibal willingly gives Will his address. After he writes it down, Will excuses himself from the room. Will goes to his superior with the address.

His superior looks up at Will from his desk, “We will check it out, but if there’s nothing there, you have nothing to go on. I’m giving you the benefit of the doubt by letting you take the lead on this because you’re a bright kid. Don’t get butt hurt if it doesn’t work out though.”

“It’s him, sir. That I’m certain.”

“Based on what? Just because he had an interest in the Primavera means nothing. Hundreds of people look at that painting a day, if not more.”

“When I showed him the crime scene photos, he said the display was beautiful. When I talked to him in the gallery, he had an obvious love for this painting. He was sketching the part of the painting used for inspiration.”

“Circumstantial. We can’t arrest him for that.”

“We need to compare his prints to any found on the bodies.”

The officer sighs, “There were none.”

“Then, we need to check his house.”

“We will. We’ll do it tonight.”

“I want to come.”

“And leave your friend all by himself?”

“He’ll make it.”

His superior laughs and sends Will to Hannibal to get his house key. Hannibal gives it over, “I would appreciate it if you all take your shoes off before entering.”

Hannibal gives a slight up-and-down look at Will.

Will takes a deep breath and leaves the room. He and his superior, along with a forensics team, go to Hannibal’s home and look around. The home is simple, surprisingly. More of an apartment than a house. There are not many trinkets. Nothing personal. The decoration is to a minimum. On the walls are traditional Japanese paintings, placed in an organized spacing. Overall, his home is spotless. The forensics team searches all over the apartment, but finds nothing incriminating.

Will goes through the personal belongings of Hannibal, mainly for the sake of understanding his psychology. He finds a lot of medical books. Both books on surgery and psychology. There are also cooking books. Some great works of literature line his bookshelves as well. He purposefully reorganizes the books so they're mixed up then walks away. He examines Hannibal's clothes. Most are formal clothing, but there are some casual sweaters. Nothing out of the ordinary. Will checks all drawers and still nothing. He makes sure there are no secret compartments hidden behind things. Unfortunately, he is called off by his superior.

"There's nothing here, Graham. Come on."

"He's the killer, sir."

"But you can't prove it."

"Not yet, but—"

"The higher-ups know someone. He looks good for the murder. He has a record and this would finally put him behind bars if he's convicted."

"What? Who?"

"He's some guy who's been brought in on assault charges before. Murder was going to happen sooner or later. Plus, he has no alibi for the murder."

"Neither does Hannibal Lecter."

"Lecter has no priors."

"You're not convicting Lecter due to circumstantial evidence, but you're planning to convict someone on the same premise."

"I'm not doing anything, Graham. I don't call the shots."

Will rubs his forehead, "That's shit. Respectfully, sir, that's shit."

"Let's calm down and go back to the station," His superior pats Will's back.

The two head back to the station and Will is in charge of letting Hannibal go. He steps inside the interrogation room to which he's met with Hannibal's sly glance. Will walks over to the table and sets down Hannibal's house key.

"You look disappointed," Hannibal speaks.

Will ignores him, "You're free to go. No charges are being brought against you."

Hannibal stands up and faces Will. His height is around two or three inches taller than Will's. He smiles down upon him. Hannibal grabs his house key and then slips his hands into his pockets.

Naturally, he licks his lips and says, “It’s been a pleasure. May I know your name, or perhaps get a business card?”

Will scoffs, “No, I don’t want you turning me into a Primavera take two.”

“It wouldn’t be the same astonishing beauty if one recreated their artwork,” Hannibal meets his eyes, “You are a very interesting man. I hope fate crosses our paths again.”

“I’d say over my dead body, but I’m not sure if you’ll take it literally.”

Hannibal smiles, “Will you walk me out?”

“You know how you came in.”

His smile turns into a frown, “That’s a shame. Goodbye, Detective.”

Will watches as Hannibal walks out of the room and down the hallway. He makes sure Hannibal leaves the station. Will sits down at his desk and lays his head down. After a deep breath, he groans and wishes to never see Hannibal unless it’s behind bars.

Over the next week, the man with a record is charged with the Primavera murder. The citizens of Florence call him Il Mostro. Will walks home after a long frustrating day at the office. He is beyond angry that they’re arresting the wrong man. Is the guy still scum? Yes, but not the right scum.

As he approaches his apartment, there’s a letter propped up against his front door. He looks at it curiously and bends down to pick it up. Will unlocks his door and goes inside, locking it behind him. He sets his stuff down and opens the envelope. Inside is a folded piece of paper. Will unfolds it and it’s the sketch of the Primavera. There’s a small note written on it:

My bookshelf feels violated. Take care, William. - H.L.

Will is filled with many emotions. The primary ones are anger and amusement. He can’t help but find some humor in Hannibal’s obvious mocking. Though, it’s not quite mockery. Will knows Hannibal wants interaction with Will. That’s not fake. He’s just being playful, and the playfulness is what’s mockery. It’s what’s irritating Will.

He carefully folds the drawing and tucks it back into the envelope. Will walks over to his nightstand where there is a small wooden box. He opens it up and inside are some personal items. He lays the envelope in the box and shuts it. Will wants to keep it as a reminder of *Il Mostro* . A reminder of the one that got away. A reminder of why he must continue with his work.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

> Now we're skipping a decade to the time Hannibal is set in. I hope you're enjoying Will and Hannibal's interactions so far. I tried to make Hannibal in chapter 1 a bit sassy and smug because I don't think he developed that well-made mask yet at that time.

After Will's final interaction with Il Mostro, he decides to move to the United States. As a kid Will, he studied English due to his father's paranoid desire to stay ahead of the times. It takes a couple of years for him to gain citizenship. In the meantime, he lives in Louisiana, working as a boat mechanic.

Once he's qualified to be a U.S. citizen, Will finalizes the paperwork and settles into his new role as an American. He leaves the field of fixing boats and returns to the police force. However, it took him a while to adjust to the Louisianan accents. In the process, it messed up Will's accent, creating an interesting mix of Southern and Italian. Let's just say his vowels are always enunciated.

Unfortunately, Will has to leave the force after failing to shoot someone when needed, which resulted in his own injury. He decides to teach anywhere he can about psychology and police work, but without a doctorate, he's not able to teach university classes.

When he settles into his new life, over ten years after leaving Florence, Will receives a letter in the mail from the Quantico field office of the FBI. He quickly opens it and it's an interview offer to be able to teach at the FBI Academy at their headquarters in Quantico. It lists a few instructions for him to get in touch with the field office. Immediately, he does.

It takes about half a year for him to go through interviews and security processing. As for mental screenings, he didn't quite pass but that's not too bothersome for the teacher position. He is fully committed to it though. After a little over a month, he hears back and they offer him the teaching position. They say he can start whenever he gets to Virginia.

Despite only living in the United States for over a decade, Will has confidence in moving states. He has saved enough money to buy a small home in as-is condition in a small town called Wolf Trap. The house is an adorable, sort of cottage-style thing. Surprisingly, it suits Will perfectly. He only uses the living room though. Never the bedroom. It's just his preference.

His adjustment to his new job is easy and he enjoys being a teacher. For the first time, he gains a friendship at work with another professor, Dr. Alana Bloom. As well as with a woman

from the forensics department, Beverly Katz. They accept him and all of his semi-rude quirks.

Once he starts working at the academy, word travels fast that Will has an exceptionally interesting way of thinking from the point of view of a killer. This causes some professors and professional psychiatrists with connections in the FBI to gain a curiosity about Will. It draws an uncomfortable amount of attention towards Will, which causes him to withdraw from any sociable tendencies and only talk to the two friends he made.

Will and his friends share a beer together after work at a local bar.

Beverly Katz sips her beer, "You know the guys we investigate… holy shit, they're messed up. We're investigating this guy who made his victims look like angels by cutting the skin off their back and stringing it up."

Alana struggles to swallow her beer for a second, "While we're drinking?"

Will smiles softly at them and sips his beer.

"Come on, I have no one but Jack and the other guys to talk to about this."

"Go ahead, Bev," Will says.

"They were found in a motel. Man and woman. I actually have pictures in my bag, if you want to take a look," Beverly looks up at Will.

He nods and motions for them. Beverly digs through her backpack and pulls out a file. She shows him the pictures of the crime scene. Will looks over them carefully, taking in details.

"The killer slept on the bed. Hair on the pillow. Sweat. Also threw up on the nightstand."

Will takes a moment and closes his eyes. Behind his eyelids, the entire murder takes place. The man and woman's backs peel open causing the skin to lift into the air. Wire goes through the skin like a needle and knots to keep the skin wings held upward. He can see himself on the bed, looking at the victims while attempting to sleep. *Now I lay me down to sleep.*

"They're praying over him. He's scared of something happening in his sleep, so they're his guardian angels," Will states.

"His toxicology showed radiation treatments and medications that one with a brain tumor would take."

"Then, there you have it. He's scared of dying in his sleep."

"You know, I could talk to Jack Crawford. I know he's heard of you, but he's been waiting for the right moment to attempt to bring you in. He knows you've been swamped with others wanting to know your thoughts."

"Considerate."

Alana steps in, “If you do start working with Jack, Will, I encourage you to maintain a healthy balance between what he puts in front of you and your personal life. It’ll blur and will do you harm.”

“I’ve been in the field before. I’ve seen some things.”

“I know but your empathy, as amazing as it is, could damage you.”

“I’m aware,” Will drinks his beer.

Beverly assures Alana with a smile, “I’ll be his chaperone.”

“See?” Will motions toward Beverly.

Alana shakes her head and laughs. They lift their drinks and click them together. The rest of the night is spent apart from work and on things like Will’s love life. Will tries his best to deflect anything.

“You have any love affairs back in Italy? Any *bellas* ?” Beverly laughs.

Will rubs his forehead, “Uh, no. I did not. Not really a lady's man. They tend to avoid me.”

“Cause you’re prettier than them.”

Alana chuckles, “That’ll do it.”

“Meet any fellows?” Beverly asks.

Will about chokes on his beer, “I–”

“I didn’t know if you dabble in both sides of the pond.”

“What about you, Beverly?” Will switches the conversation onto her.

“I visit any area of the pond. Even outside of it.”

Alana smiles at Beverly’s openness, which Beverly uses as an opportunity to change the topic to her.

“And you, Miss Bloom?” Beverly asks.

“Me? Women are beautiful, but my preference is men. Sorry to disappoint,” Alana replies.

“That’s what they all say, honey. Give it a month.”

Will laughs at them, so then they turn on him. He tells them nothing about his preferences. Eventually, they move on and talk about a TV show they both watch. Will just enjoys their company.

After they all tire of beer and being out, they all say goodbye and head home. Will gets ready for bed and plops onto his mattress that lays in the middle of his living room. Sleep overtakes

him quickly.

The angels kneel over him, eyes closed in prayer. Will slides out of bed and steps back from them. He circles around to their backside, observing their mutilated bodies. He almost touches their flayed skin. A voice stops him.

'Do you find this amateurish work beautiful, William?'

He turns around and all of a sudden, the setting changes. He's in an alleyway, facing the back of a truck. However, the truck bed is empty. He turns around again and floating upright is the Il Mostro replica of the Primavera.

'I have shown you true art. True beauty. Do you miss it? These pathetic attempts at something greater than one's self will never amass to the standards I set for you.'

Will's eyes fill with tears as he stares at the Primavera's 3D display. It is truly beautiful. Though terrifying. The image has not left Will's mind since he laid eyes on it that day as his superior warned. Now, it resides in his mind, permanently mocking him.

Will wakes up early in the morning in a sweat. He crawls off the mattress and stands up. In a sleepy walk, he goes to the bathroom to shower and change for work. Since he's already up and dressed, despite it being 6AM, he makes coffee and goes to work. He arrives at work close to 7AM.

He goes to his classroom and works on grading any assignments he has yet done. He believes himself as a fair, not hard, grader. Whether the students agree, he's not sure. Back in Italy, he obtained an accelerated pace master's degree in psychology. Since he's been in the FBI, they have offered to pay for his education if he decides on a Ph.D. He rejects it, however, and instead takes full advantage of the FBI's library access. Often, he spends time studying books on behavior.

Will sits there, slowly turning his chair from side to side. He marks through a paper, giving feedback. As a professor, he feels like it's his obligation to give advice and feedback so the students improve. Otherwise, what's the purpose? He thrives off the uninterrupted environment.

Then, someone walks in and interrupts his environment. Will looks up through the top of his glasses and sees an unfamiliar face. He moves his attention to the man walking in. The man approaches the desk, "Mr. Graham?"

Will nods.

"Agent Jack Crawford. I head the Behavioral Science Unit."

"Yes, I've heard of you," Will avoids direct eye contact.

"Vice versa. There's been lots of talk on your ability to empathize with… narcissists… sociopaths," Jack lists.

"I can empathize with anybody. All it takes is an active imagination."

“Can I borrow your imagination?” Jack searches for Will’s eyes until he finally gets them.

Will looks at Jack, “The Angel Maker?”

Jack nods.

“Beverly Katz already gave me a rundown of the case so far and said for me to expect you to possibly reach out.”

“And your insights?”

“The killer is scared of death, so he made angels watch over him while he slept. You know he has a brain tumor, considering the drugs in his system and the radiation. Aren’t there databases you can check by the way? To check his DNA against cancer patients?”

“We have a team member on that, but right now, a new body dropped. Want to come?”

“Sounds like a party invitation.”

Will accepts the invite and rides with Jack over to the crime scene. Mounted from scaffolding in an alleyway is a man, made into an angel. Jack and Will approach the scene. Already there is Beverly Katz and two other men, Brian Zeller and Jimmy Price, to who Will is introduced to. Jack and Will look up at the angel, somewhat captivated by the sight.

“Why angels?” Jack asks.

“His mind has turned against him and he’s without help.”

Off to the side, Zeller finds a pair of severed balls. Beverly looks up at the security guard, seeing he’s not missing anything. She asks, “They’re not his. Did the Angel Maker castrate himself?”

“He’s getting ready to become an Angel,” Will chimes in.

Jack sighs, “He was afraid of dying and now he’s getting used to the idea?”

“He’s accepted it or he’s bargaining.”

Zeller jokes, “Some bargaining chips.”

“Do you think he’s done making angels or just getting started?”

“Don’t know,” Will responds to Jack.

The forensics team cleans up the scene and they all head back to the lab to look at the previous two victims. Price walks up to the group and the two victims who arelaid on the slab. He gives them the identities of the two victims. Turns out they were criminals, as well as the recent victim.

“Could he be a vigilante?” Beverly asks.

“He’s playing God.”

With Will’s help, they’re able to run through the case slightly faster. Zeller comes over to join the group, holding a file. He sets it down in front of them and begins to speak, “Our Angel Maker is Elliot Budish. He was diagnosed 5 months ago. Family hasn’t seen him in four.”

Jack nods, “Let’s talk to the family.”

It takes a day for them to get in contact with the wife of the Angel Maker. Jack Crawford decides to take Will with him to speak to the wife. From the wife, they learn the wife left Elliot after his diagnosis, Elliot kept pulling away from the family, he became angry but not violent, and that as a boy, he almost died in a fire. During this event, a fireman who resuscitated him said Elliot must’ve had a guardian Angel. They get the address of where the fire happened and together, Jack and Will, travel to the farm.

When they get to the farm, they are met with another angel. This time the angel is the Angel Maker, Elliot. Hanging from the ceiling of the barn, blood drips from his freshly made wings.

“Guess this is the last one,” Will comments.

Jack nods, “Yeah.”

“Sorry, I wasn’t much help in this case.”

“You were. Would you want to accompany us on other cases? Might take you away from your classroom though.”

“I’d like that, yeah.”

“Good. Good. I’ll call the coroner.”

Jack walks to the SUV and dials the number of a coroner to come clear the scene. The two men get in the SUV and drive back to Quantico. On the way, the men talk casually and get to know each other a bit more.

“Are all your cases extreme like this one?” Will asks.

“We get some crazy ones. Not all the time, but it feels like too often. Funny enough, we thought this guy at first might’ve been the Ripper with his displayed mutilation, but obviously, it was not. Not with all the crap left at the scene.”

“The Ripper?”

“I forget you’re not from around here. The Chesapeake Ripper is a serial killer who hasn’t been active for two years. Gruesome murders. Never left evidence. Never caught. He’s a son of a bitch.”

“Mmm.”

“He goes through periods of dormancy then kills in three. Then, again, gone.”

Will nods. He goes home and researches the Ripper. As he views the murders, he can’t help but feel a sort of familiarity with the technique. It’s cleaner. It’s now a mastered trade. The beauty however is consistent in its excellence. There’s no doubt in Will’s mind— it’s *Il Mostro* .

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

Hannibal comes back a little this chapter.

Over the next week, Will's dreams are corrupted with vivid reconstructions of the Chesapeake Ripper's crimes. Over and over, they repeat. Even when he blinks, they're there. His sleep has been halted with sweat and feverish symptoms. Will labels it as an anxious reaction to a nightmare and moves on.

One morning, Will gets a phone call from Jack Crawford asking to meet him in his office. Will does so. Jack informs him of a murder in the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane that he'd like Will to come with to check out. Will agrees to go.

On the way over, Jack asks, "Did you look up the Ripper after I mentioned him?"

"Yes," Will answers.

"Good, you get a good feel for his kills?"

"I did."

Jack nods, "The reporter, Freddie Lounds, ran an unconfirmed story that the Chesapeake Ripper might already be in custody."

"Unconfirmed? Am I confirming?"

"You're fact-checking."

Jack pulls up to the BSCHI and the two get out of the SUV. They meet the head of the hospital, Dr. Frederick Chilton, in his office. Will can't say that he got a good first impression of the man. He immediately thinks he's cocky.

"Doctor Bloom just called me about you Mr. Graham. Or is it Doctor Graham?" Chilton says.

"I'm not a doctor."

"That's a temporary agent identification badge."

Jack informs, "Mr. Graham teaches at the academy."

"A teacher," Chilton smiles and motions for them to sit down.

“Dr. Chilton, we need to see the crime scene while it’s still relatively undisturbed,” Jack states.

“For something so disturbing, I assure you it’s undisturbed.”

“Graham needs to see the crime scene with as much privacy as possible.”

Chilton’s smile returns even wider, “Ah, yes. That thing you do. You are quite the topic of conversation in psychiatric circles.”

“Am I?” Will asks, unamused and annoyed.

“A unique cocktail of personality disorders and neuroses that gift you a profound ability to empathize with psychopaths.”

“Graham isn’t here to be analyzed,” Jack interrupts.

“Perhaps he should be,” Chilton looks at Will, “Would you mind talking to some of the staff? Not this trip. Dr. Bloom was adamant on the point to leave you alone.”

“I’d like to see the crime scene now,” Will switches the topic.

Chilton nods and takes Jack and Will to the body. The person killed was a female nurse who was left unattended with a patient, named Abel Gideon. On that alone, Will doesn’t believe whatever he is about to see is the Chesapeake Ripper’s doing. Jack and Will are shown the body. It’s a very well-done replica of one of the previous Ripper murders of the Wound Man.

The nurse has been impaled with every medical instrument in the room. Shards of metal stick out of her and her organs lay above her body, propped up on shards. Her eyes have been pushed into her skull, leaving bloody gaps in their place.

“The reason you have failed and kept failing to catch the Chesapeake Ripper is because I already had him,” Chilton states.

Jack gives Chilton a look and leads him out of the room, allowing Will a moment of privacy with the body. While the body appears like one the Ripper has done, Will doesn’t believe it is him. In his mind, he pieces together the events of the murder. He sees how the patient escaped and brutally murdered the nurse. Though, he envisions himself as the patient. He feels the warmth of the nurse’s blood seeping from her eyes onto his hand. He feels the force needed to push a pole through her body. As if it was himself, he walks through each step.

When Will is done, he returns to Jack. He’s informed that Gideon was imprisoned at the same time the Ripper stopped killing. He and Jack decide to return to Quantico for the afternoon. Will is then scheduled with Alana to speak to Abel Gideon tomorrow to see if he’s the Ripper.

The next day, Alana, Will, and Chilton speak together but Will dismisses himself for air to escape Chilton. The two interview Gideon separately. When Will goes to Gideon’s cell and sees him for the first time, he is rather disappointed. While he didn’t think Gideon was Il Mostro, he was hopeful. Will sits down on a bench across from Gideon’s cell.

“Dr. Gideon, I’m Will Graham. Thank you for your time. Shall we start?”

“What’s there to say? I was caught red-handed. Literally. No mystery as to who done it. I did.”

“The mystery is whether you are who you say you are.”

Gideon goes on a rant about how he never liked the name ‘Chesapeake Ripper’ and how he wished it was more distinct. Will couldn’t care less.

“Is that why you hadn’t taken credit for the Ripper murders until now?” Will asks.

“I was just enjoying the goose chase from the box seats,” Gideon explains.

“Two years of goose-chasing. You must be a very patient man,” Will responds monotone, “What effect were you hoping to have by killing the nurse?”

“The effect I was hoping for was her death. Elevated to my art.”

“Brutalization of the body was done posthumously. The Chesapeake Ripper usually does that sort of thing during, not after,” Will can’t help but like the Ripper’s theatrical side.

Gideon responds, “I don’t need to convince you I’m the Chesapeake Ripper.”

“Seems that’s what you need to do. It’s certainly what someone needs.”

Will finishes his questioning and returns to the forensics lab to meet with the BAU team. When he arrives, they’re standing over the nurse’s body, examining it with Jack watching. Will watches them talk about how the Ripper kills without a distinct category of gender or race. Zeller points out that the nurse has the exact same wound patterns as the last victim.

“We didn’t find a body for his last known victim,” Jack corrects Zeller.

“Then the victim before that.”

Will looks over at Jack, remembering that he read something about an FBI trainee gone missing. He decides to take over for Zeller to relieve him of the awkwardness.

“I see the Ripper but I don’t… feel the Ripper. He’s an artist. This is… plagiarism.”

Jack replies, “We never made the wound patterns on any of the Ripper victims public.”

Will scratches his head, “Maybe he is the Ripper. I don’t know. But if he is a plagiarist, the real Chesapeake Ripper is going to make sure everybody knows it.”

The rest of the day is spent by Will teaching, then working late to write up a report on his conversation with Abel Gideon. He looks at his laptop and thinks about searching up Hannibal Lecter’s name, but decides against it. For whatever reason, he has never, in over a decade, looked for Hannibal in any fashion.

When they get to work the next day, Jack is frustrated over apparently receiving a call from his missing trainee. However, the team finds no trace of a call. Will sits in his classroom a few hours later, when Jack and Alana come in to propose an idea.

Jack begins speaking, “We have a medium where we can speak to the Chesapeake Ripper. Is there a way we could push him?”

“Push him toward what?” Will asks, squinting his eyes.

“We might be able to influence him to blow up and become visible,” Alana adds.

“Could we enrage him?”

Will rubs his hands, “To what purpose? I’m not sure what you’re asking for.”

“Could we enrage the Chesapeake Ripper and focus his attention?”

“Don’t fool around.”

“Gideon is just a rumor. We need to make him the truth.”

Will looks up at Jack, “You might push him to kill again just to prove he isn’t in a hospital for the criminally insane.”

“I have to push.”

“Are you thinking about getting into bed with Freddie Lounds?”

“It’s the best way to bait the Ripper,” Jack states.

Later that day, Jack, along with Alana and Will, meet with Freddie Lounds and he makes a deal with her for her to confirm publically that Gideon is the Ripper. The next day, an article is published confirming that the Chesapeake Ripper is locked up and his name is Abel Gideon.

Over the next two days, Jack receives another call from his missing trainee, Miriam Lass. That one is untraceable, but finally, another call is made, which is traceable. It leads the team to an abandoned observatory.

“What was Miriam Lass looking into?” Will asks Beverly.

“Medical records. If the Ripper was a surgeon, she thought he might have treated one of the victims. They tried retracing her steps, but she must've made a jump somewhere. Every surgeon that came in contact with a Ripper victim has been thoroughly observed.”

Will nods.

Jack moves closer to the observatory and opens his phone. He says with a hint of nervousness, “That last call left something the others didn’t. A phone number.”

He dials the number and hears ringing from inside the observatory. The trio walks inside the observatory, climbing a flight of stairs to get to the telescope. Underneath the telescope is a beheaded woman. The head sat next to the body, which is propped up into a kneeling position. Around the eyes is a white blindfold and the body is dressed in a white dress. In front of the body is an execution block. *The Execution of Lady Jane Grey* , Will notices the similarity to the painting.

Jack's eyes fall dark, lined with tears. Despite the blindfold, he knows it's his trainee. Beside the head is a note with writing: *What do you see?* Will looks at Beverly, wondering if she will comfort Jack. She puts a hand on Jack's shoulder and tries to get him to begin walking outside. Will stays behind.

Will looks at this body and sees *Il Mostro* without a doubt. That same familiarity he saw with the Ripper victims returns and it makes him feel as if his lungs have filled with icy water. His gut turns as he recognizes the beauty of it all. He shuts his eyes and hears *Il Mostro.*

The punishment for disgracing my art is death. For now, the blood spilled was innocent. Her death was swift. My mercy will reach its end soon if my name is tarnished by tabloids and law enforcement. The beauty I create is above your understanding. Do not claim credit for something not of your doing, unless you're willing to pay.

He opens his eyes and makes his way to Jack and Beverly. Jack is in obvious pain and he is frustrated he cannot assist in the way Beverly might. He decides to shed light on the reason for Miriam's death, however.

Will approaches Jack and stands in front of him. He says, "I'm sorry for your loss. This will either make you feel better, indifferent, or want to hit me. I accept all of the above. Miriam died quickly and her death was not personal to her. He thought her innocent, but Gideon's blood is unavailable to him."

Jack nods and pats his shoulder, "Go home, Will. Thank you."

Will gives a soft smile and walks away. He gets in his car and drives to Wolf Trap. By the time he gets back from Baltimore, the sun has set. Unable to stop his thoughts from traveling to Il Mostro, he decides to look up Hannibal's name when he gets home. When he gets inside his home, he opens his laptop and goes to Google. He takes a deep breath and searches up Hannibal Lecter.

Several articles and websites pop up. Will scrolls through the pages, reading things about how Hannibal Lecter is now an esteemed psychiatrist who used to be a surgeon. He dominates his field and has published several papers with his research. He has a degree from John's Hopkins. And, of course, he lives in Baltimore where the Chesapeake Ripper kills.

A smile spreads across Will's face as he knows he's found Il Mostro once more. Unfortunately now, he has more crimes added to his name. Will finds his website and reads through it. There's not any personal bio, but rather lists of papers he published and his credentials. His website says he's available for appointments and if given three days notice, he might be able to schedule an appointment the same week.

Will looks at the phone number for a moment, debating on whether or not to call. He decides that he only lives once, and dials the number. For a moment, he doubts the call will be answered, but it is answered.

“Dr. Hannibal Lecter,” the familiar voice speaks.

In the most natural southern American accent he can muster, which is surprisingly accurate, Will replies, “Hello, I was wondering if you have an appointment available for this week.”

“Does the date or time matter?” He asks.

“No, they don’t.”

There’s a pause on the other side and the movement of paper.

“Would Wednesday at 7:30PM work for you?”

“Yeah, that’s perfect. How much is the session?”

“You needn’t pay for the first appointment.”

“Is business that good?” Will jokes.

Hannibal's voice sounds a bit more lively after Will’s joke, “I suppose so. Might I have your name?”

Will can’t help but remember when Hannibal asked for his name back in Florence. He quickly gives a fake last name, “Will Turner.”

“Very well, I look forward to our session.”

“As do I, Dr. Lecter.”

Will hangs up the phone and sets his phone down. For a moment, he just stares, surprised he did that. He lays back on his couch and sinks into a state of thought and preparation for Wednesday.

Faster than he thought, Wednesday night arrives. Will dresses in a light gray sweater and dark gray pants with boots. As he pulls onto the street of Hannibal’s office, he wonders if he should’ve told someone where he was going. Though, he doesn’t expect Hannibal to kill him.

He pulls into a parking spot at 7:20PM and sits in the waiting room by 7:22PM. His heart races but his exterior is completely monotone and appears calm. Will takes a deep breath and waits for 7:30PM. He doesn’t bother sitting. Right on the dot, the office door opens. Standing there is Dr. Lecter, over a decade older, but very well aged.

Will turns to face Hannibal and it takes only a second for a smile to come to Hannibal’s face.

He greets, “William.”

“Doctor Lecter,” Will responds.

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

Okay, now here is some Will and Hannibal interaction. Lot of it.

Hannibal opens the door wide, “Please come in.”

Will does and as he steps inside, he feels somewhat like prey walking into the predator’s trap. He accepts it as it is though. Hannibal shuts the door behind him. Will’s eyes scan the room, taking in the decor. The room has a strong element of control in the air. Just like Hannibal’s old home.

Hannibal walks over to his desk while Will is observing. He sits and opens a notebook to erase something. He then writes over whatever he erased. He closes the notebook and fixes his attention fully on Will.

Will makes his way around the room, examining what books like his many shelves. Like previously, they are medical books for both surgery and psychology. He dismisses that section and moves over to a table Hannibal has in one of the corners. On top are many sketches. Some are portraits and some are architectural designs. Somehow Hannibal’s artistry has improved since they last saw each other.

Once Will has made a lap around the room, he focuses on Hannibal. When Hannibal sees Will is back in the moment, he speaks first, “I adjusted your name in my scheduling.”

“Apologies, but I wanted the element of surprise.”

“All is well. I enjoy a surprise every once and a while. This one will be one for the books.”

Will puts his hands in his pockets, “You’ve gotten far in life.”

“My drawings earned me an internship at John’s Hopkins.”

“Glad Primavera got you somewhere.”

Hannibal looks down with a small smile, then back at Will. He asks, “Did you like my letter?”

“It was slightly creepy, in case you didn’t realize.”

“Did you like it?” Hannibal repeats his question.

“It humored me.”

“What did you do with it after you opened it?”

“I kept it. I still have it,” Will admits.

A smirk grows on Hannibal’s face before he wipes it off. Hannibal stands and walks over to Will. He passes by him and takes a seat at his appointment chair. His hand stretches out for Will to sit at the chair across from him. Will does so. He must admit to himself that Hannibal has grown much more intimidating with age. That monster that was only a small sapling has grown into a large oak.

“When did you leave for John’s Hopkins?” Will asks.

“Not too long after our interaction.”

“Fleeing the country?”

Hannibal corrects, “Exploring new opportunities.”

“To kill elsewhere.”

“What brings you to Baltimore, William?” Hannibal ignores Will’s attempt at tossing guilt at him.

“Like you, I moved after our interaction. Moved to Louisiana where I stayed until I got a job offer up here, so now I’m here.”

“Did you stay in law enforcement?”

“When I first moved, until I became a citizen, I was a mechanic. Then, when I got my citizenship, I returned to law enforcement until I had to leave due to an error on my part. After that, I began teaching some. Nothing worthwhile though. Until I got a teaching job up here, so I’m doing that now.”

“Might I ask what error on your part?”

Will doesn’t bother not telling him, “I failed to pull the trigger when I needed to. Resulted in a knife in my shoulder.”

Hannibal nods, “And what do you teach?”

“Psychology.”

“Where?”

Will debates whether or not to tell him. He decides not quite yet.

“Asking a lot of questions, aren’t you?” Will replies.

Hannibal allows him the subject shift, “I’m curious about you. I would’ve enjoyed speaking to you back then, but you had no interest in speaking to me.”

“To be fair, I had just brought you in as a suspect.”

“I’m still a suspect to you, but you’ve seemed to change your mind on not having an interest in me.”

“Yes, you are still a suspect.”

“I admire your persistence, William.”

“You can just call me Will. I’ve never gone by William.”

“Call me Hannibal then.”

Will shakes his nods, “I’m still adjusting to Doctor Lecter.”

“Very well.”

“I read you did surgery but stopped. Why?” Will asks.

“I killed someone, or more accurately couldn’t save someone, but it felt like killing them.”

Will holds back any laughter, “You were an emergency room surgeon. Has to happen from time to time.”

“It happened one time too many. Now, I fix minds instead of bodies and no one has died as a result of my therapy.”

Hannibal’s eyes never leave Will. It’s semi-unsettling for Will, but he doesn’t bother to do anything about it. He keeps some eye contact, though not much. Moments of silence pass with Hannibal just looking at Will.

“Why are you here, Will?” Hannibal asks bluntly.

“I teach at the FBI academy in Quantico. Recently, I’ve been assisting on cases. I couldn’t help but get a sense of familiarity from a recent murder. You’ve lived in this area much longer than me, so I’m sure you’ve heard of the Chesapeake Ripper. His kills remind me of Il Mostro’s Primavera.”

“You’re now accusing me of being another killer? Your manners are lacking, dear William.”

“I have no evidence or authority to bring you in for anything, Dr. Lecter. I’m not going to risk it after where it got me before. You would just pack up and leave. Maybe sue me with a posh lawyer in the process.”

Hannibal tilts his head ever so slightly and his eyes lose their humor, “Are you here to find evidence?”

Will looks into Hannibal’s eyes, trying to get a read off him. As he looks, he sees a live construction of walls. Walls that will not be breached. Whatever is behind them doesn’t plan

on going without a fight. Any false welcoming attitude they may have presented is gone, and the devil remains.

Will sighs, “Not today.”

“Planning on more interactions?”

“If you’re available.”

Hannibal’s humor returns and he lightly smiles, “Of course. Would you like actual appointments or would you prefer to meet elsewhere? Perhaps over dinner? I’ve been told I'm good in the kitchen.”

“You as my therapist,” Will leans back in his chair and manspreads. In his mind, he thinks, *Imagine the damage that’ll do* .

Hannibal waits for Will to answer.

“Why not? May I get dinner as well?”

“Of course. If you’re not opposed to attending a dinner party, I’m hosting one this Sunday.”

Will takes a deep breath, “I don’t think I’d be good company.”

“I disagree.”

“How many people will be at this dinner party?”

“I have eight seats at my table. Those who sit there will be colleagues and those I have met in my social circle.”

“So, psychiatrists and rich people.”

Hannibal doesn’t respond.

Will asks, “Can I let you know by Friday?”

“That’s fine. I’ll give you my address,” Hannibal rises from his chair and walks over to his desk.

He pulls out a note card and writes down the details of the dinner party such as his address, time, and date. He includes his personal phone number as well. Hannibal walks over to Will and hands him the card. Will takes the card and looks up at Hannibal. Hannibal stands in front of Will, connecting eye contact.

“You look good, William. Though, it appears like a good night’s sleep has been evading you.”

“A good night’s sleep and I aren’t compatible.”

“I have the time to discuss it if you do.”

Will breaks eye contact, “Maybe after the dinner party.”

“Very well,” Hannibal takes a step back.

Will stands up, “I’m going to head home. Long drive.”

Hannibal nods, “Do you live in Quantico?”

“Wolf Trap.”

“Fitting.”

“Calling me a loner?” Will jokes.

“You aren’t a loner, but you do enjoy solitude.”

Hannibal walks Will to the exit. He opens the door and gently touches the small of Will’s back, which causes Will to get chills and stand up straighter. Will steps through the door and looks back at Hannibal. Hannibal stays in the doorway.

“I’ll see you,” Will gives a small nod of goodbye.

“Goodnight, Will.”

Will heads to his car. Hannibal remains by the door, ensuring Will reaches his car safely. Once Will drives off, he goes back inside his office building. Will makes his way back to his house in Wolf Trap, a drive that takes over an hour.

The drive is silent. Will fears that if he turns on any music, on top of his thoughts, he might end up crashing the car. Probably purposefully. His mind is overwhelmed with him meeting Hannibal after all these years. The entire time, he was composed but now his energy is gone and he’s crumbling apart.

As he drives, his ears ring and his fingers tap against the steering wheel. He takes one hand off the steering wheel to rub his eyes. When he moves his hand away from his face, he sees a woman in a white dress in the road ahead of him. Quickly, he grabs the wheel and tries to swerve out of the way.

His car goes into a ditch and Will hits his head against the driver’s side window. The car comes to a sudden stop and Will puts it in park. Will unbuckles his seatbelt and opens his door. He crawls out of the car and lays on the grass. Taking deep breaths, Will stays there while attempting to recover. Though he’s still, the world seems to be spinning and he feels like he’s moving along with it.

Suddenly, Will remembers why he swerved the car and he pushes himself to his feet. He gets out of the ditch and looks for the woman he saw. However, there’s no one.

No one is in the road. No one is around the road.

There is no one besides him.

He looks around for a short bit, but decides he must've seen something else. Possibly a reflection of his headlights off the white lines in the road. Will checks out his car for damage and there's nothing broken or dented. There are scuff marks though. He sighs and gets back in his car. Will drives out of the ditch and finishes the drive back to his house. When he gets home, he pours himself some whiskey and ends up falling asleep in his chair.

Will opens his eyes, blinded by fluorescent lights. He attempts to sit up, but his limbs do not move. Feeling cold, his head shifts to see what he's laying on. It's a metal slab. One you would find in the forensics lab, or in a surgical room.

Approaching is the sound of heels against tile floor. Will tries to lift his head up but a hand, coming from behind, holds his head against the table. The hand is joined by another and each holds one side of Will's head. Will's eyes look at the person and it's Hannibal. Panic fills Will as he tries to rock himself off the table. He doesn't budge.

'Let me in.'

Something else approaches. It's stag-like, but its figure is also humane. From antler to toe, the stagman is solid black like an endless void. The stagman hovers its hand above Will's abdomen. Its fingers are as sharp as scalpels. Will tries to shake his head and beg for them to stop, but no sound is made. The stagman pierces underneath Will's rib cage and slices him down to his pants line. A tear slides down Will's cheek.

Will jerks up from the chair, knocking over his whiskey glass. It shatters against the ground, sending chips of glass flying across the floor. He bends down and carefully begins scooping the shards into his palm. Once he gets all of the pieces he sees, he throws them away and goes into his room to shower.

His drive to work is uneventful. No more swerving. He would think work would also be uneventful, but since Jack brought him in, there's no more typical days. He is called to a crime scene for a possible Chesapeake Ripper murder at a hotel. When Will gets to the scene, Jack takes him to the room.

Jack informs, "Found in the bathroom. Abdominal mutilation and organ removal. Tell me if you see the Ripper."

"Expecting a few more bodies after this one?" Will asks.

"If it's the Chesapeake Ripper, I am."

"Don't let the Ripper stir you up. He used Miriam to poke you, but remember it wasn't personal to Miriam."

"He could be starting another cycle."

Will looks at Jack, "If he's killing again, he's not going to be subtle about it. He'll just pick up the phone."

“If this is the Ripper, there will be at least two more bodies, then nothing for months, maybe years. We’ll have a window to catch him and then that window will close. The last time it closed, I lost the Ripper and I lost Miriam Lass.”

Jack takes him inside the crime scene where the rest of the team is sifting through anything possibly useful. He asks, “Has anyone touched the body?”

Beverly answers, “I touched the body. A lot going on with that body. Surgery was performed. And then un-performed. Hi, Will.”

Will gives a small wave.

“The surgery was un-performed with bare hands. Sutures were clawed open,” Brian looks at Jack, “I did a little touching.”

They take a look at the man in the bathroom. He’s laying dead in the tub, ripped open from his neck to his pelvic area. The tub is full of a few inches of blood. Will points out the surgery wasn’t done on location due to how there would’ve been more blood. The man’s fingernails show that he attempted to claw open the sutures. The body is missing a kidney and the heart is slightly traumatized by someone attempting to mess with it.

Life fades from the victim’s eyes. An incision is made in his chest. Following that, the sternum is cracked open, providing access to the heart. His heart is taken into another hand and massaged. Internal cardiac massage. It's no help. The victim dies with a hand in his chest.

Will provides an explanation, “Whoever did the surgery was trying to save this man. His heart seized and the killer attempted to give him an internal cardiac massage. It’s probably some medical student or trainee trying to make an extra buck on a back-alley surgery and it went bad.”

Brian shakes his head, “It’s the Ripper. Knife wounds are cuts. Anatomical knowledge. Dissection. Organ removal. There are 22 signature components all attributable to the same killer.”

“22 possible components.”

“It’s the Ripper.”

Jack interrupts, “Are you sure, Will?”

“More or less.”

“Why are you sure?”

Will sighs, “The Ripper left a victim in a church pew using his tongue as a page maker in the Bible he was holding. *This* isn’t *that* .”

“How do you see the Ripper?”

It takes a moment for Will to respond. He carefully thinks about his wording, “I see him as something that was destined to die. However, against all odds, he doesn’t die. He appears normal and nobody can tell what he is.”

The team stares at Will and Jack doesn’t know what to do with Will’s interpretation. He just tells the team to finish up the scene and get back to the lab as soon as they can. Will returns to Quantico and finally is able to teach.

After the sun has set that day, Will, Alana, and Beverly meet for dinner. Nothing special. Just a burger joint. Alana and Beverly speak about work and Jack primarily. They talk of his mental health since Miriam was found and they tell Will about how his wife has cancer. He just nods along, kind of lost in his thoughts.

Beverly notices how out-of-it Will looks and switches the focus onto him, “You good?”

Will rubs his beard, “Yeah, I’m good. Just lots of Ripper talk recently.”

“I get that. No matter what case we catch, it seems to keep coming back to the Ripper lately.”

Alana comments, “Comes with the territory.”

Beverly nods while she sips her beer and eats some fries.

Will thinks about Hannibal’s dinner party invitation. It’s a stupid idea for him to play around Il Mostro, but it’s also an opportunity. What if one day, he’s able to gain Hannibal’s trust and he confesses. Or, if he’s invited to his home, Will might be able to find evidence. It’s risky, but it would give him a chance to finally catch Hannibal.

He sighs and asks the group for their help, “Okay, so I have this guy who invited me to a dinner party with a bunch of psychiatrists and rich people. Do I go or not?”

“Are you talking about Hannibal Lecter?” Alana asks, which shocks Will.

He nods.

“I didn’t know you knew him.”

“We met back in Florence. Recently got back in touch.”

“That’s awesome. He mentored me at John’s Hopkins. Brilliant in his field, that’s for sure.”

“Small world.”

“You should go to the party. I’m going to be there, so if you need a buffer, I’m right there.”

“Okay, okay. Might go now. What do I wear?”

Beverly laughs, “I’ve never met the man, but the answer is the nicest suit you own.”

“It’s not very nice,” Will gives a pathetic chuckle.

Alana takes over, “Any dress pants you have with a button up shirt will be good enough.”

“Do a dark blue shirt,” Beverly says, “It’ll bring out your features, and trust me, no one will even care about what quality you’re wearing. They’ll be too busy falling for you.”

Will’s chuckle turns into a good laugh. Alana smiles.

“Alright, blue it is.”

He pulls out his phone and goes to contacts. Instead of calling, he sends a text to Hannibal’s personal number, saying he will be in attendance at the dinner party.

Hannibal: Lovely. I will seat you at my right hand.

Will tucks his phone in his pocket and lifts his beer for the group to cheers one another. They do and Will drinks.

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

"Your mask is slipping."

Torso and legs separated across the bus aisle, connected by a rope of intestines. Heart and kidneys removed surgically from the body. The first of a series.

Following— three more deceased over three days. Each missing organs and are displayed in some fashion. The organs span from hearts, kidneys, livers, lungs, to even spleens.

"Who the hell gets a spleen transplant?" Jimmy Price squints his eyes toward the team.

Will examines one of the victims, "Intestines were the only thing missing from this body."

Zeller sighs, "So either there's someone out there with Crohn's disease and short bowels, or the Ripper's making sausage."

"He's selling the organs to someone," Jack says.

"We don't even know if these organs are being transplanted in the U.S. They could be exported to China," Zeller adds.

"How many killers?"

"Two," Will answers.

"And you're confident one of them is the Ripper?"

"Yes."

"Two different killers, same agenda?" Beverly asks.

"Is the organ harvester disguising his work as the crimes of a serial killer or is the serial killer disguising his work as the crimes of an organ harvester?" Price looks at Will.

Will stares at the bodies on slabs, "The Chesapeake Ripper wants to perform. Every brutal choice has elegance, grace. His mutilations hide the true nature of his crimes."

"Window is closing, Will. How is he choosing his victims?" Jack continues.

"He's met all of them before. Only way he could tissue-type them," Will answers in reference to the organ harvester.

The team works on trying to find a connection between the victims. While they do that, Will returns to class. He stays later to catch up on his grading. He can't but zone out when wondering why Hannibal is suddenly accelerating his crimes.

' *Maybe he's frustrated over Gideon still so he's letting everyone know. Wouldn't he wait until the organ harvester was caught first though, so the same mistake wouldn't be made?'* Will considers.

Jack Crawford and Beverly Katz walk into Will's classroom.

"Will, we have a lead on the Ripper," Jack starts.

Beverly picks up, "I was thinking about how the surgery wasn't performed on scene, so the killer needs a vehicle. Possibly a truck, or an ambulance. I checked the security cameras across the street of the hotel. A private ambulance was at the crime scene seen driving *away* from the scene."

"Ready to go catch the Ripper?" Jack asks.

He's not the Ripper.

Will nods.

They go to the warehouse where the private ambulances park when not on duty. Beverly tells the manager which ambulance they're looking for, but the ambulance is currently checked out. She asks if it has GPS, which it does, so she is able to track down the ambulance. The ambulance is tracked to an isolated grassy area. Inside they find a man performing a kidney transplant, but failing. The man is having to give a cardiac massage. Beverly calls for EMTs to arrive on scene, but without a better surgeon already there, there's not enough time to save the donor. The donor does, adding another body to the pile.

On the drive back to Quantico, Jack is angry about his inability to save another person. Beverly and Will remain quiet. She wishes she would have thought about checking the cameras sooner. While they are focused on the dead donor, Will can't help but think about how he was right and everyone else was wrong. It was two killers. The Ripper was never the organ harvester.

When he goes home that night, Will is kept up by the sight of the four Ripper victims. No matter what, he can't rid himself of the memory. He drinks some whiskey in a plastic cup, returning it to the kitchen before he goes to sleep.

The day of the dinner party arrives in the morning, which leaves Will in an awfully anxious mood the entire day. He hates the process of killing time when there's something you don't want to do later in the day. He knows it's coming. He dreads it and wants it to just be over, but there's no option except to wait.

Will follows Beverly's advice and wears a dark blue button up. He matches it to black pants and black loafers. Nothing too nice, but the nicest he has. Before leaving his house, he tries to

control his hair by damping it slightly. He sprays some nicer cologne that he hasn't used since his interviews with the FBI.

He debated earlier on whether to get there early, or right before the time listed. He decided on getting there right before the time Hannibal told him. Will arrives at Hannibal's lovely and expensive home right at the time he was told. When he arrives, he is let in by a man in a uniform, which he wasn't at all expecting. The doorman leads Will to a group of people gathering in the dining room. There are place cards at each seat besides the head of the table. Will looks for his name and he is sat in the first chair to the right of the head of the table. He's at Hannibal's right hand, just like Hannibal said he'd be.

Will sits down when others sit down. Across from him is Alana, which he's relieved about. They exchange a small wave. After everyone is seated, Hannibal comes out as well as servers carrying platters of food. He stands at the head of the table while the plates are placed down on the table in an organized manner. The servers fill all glasses with wine and step to the side, lined up against the wall.

People begin clapping and Will looks around confused, but he starts clapping. In his opinion, they clapped a bit too long, but maybe that's a rich people tradition. Hannibal lifts his hand for people to stop. Will can't help but notice how much Hannibal loves the praise.

"Before we begin, you must all be warned: Nothing here is vegetarian. Bon appetit," Hannibal looks over at Will and winks. Then, he faces the table to raise his wine glass and take a sip.

The rest of the table takes a sip of the wine and the dinner begins. Hannibal takes a seat and observes as people eat. Will leans over, "Very nice presentation."

Hannibal smiles and gives a small head bow.

The woman to the right of Will strikes up a conversation with Hannibal and Will. She says in a humorous tone, "You must be special. See, that seat used to be mine. I guess Hannibal wanted someone with a handsome youthful glow."

Will doesn't know what to say, but Hannibal takes over. He introduces her to Will, "Mrs. Komeda, this is Will Graham. He's a friend who I've had the pleasure of reuniting with after over a decade of separation."

"That's grand! How did you two meet?"

"We met in Florence. It was a quick interaction between us but one that was extremely memorable."

"I'm glad you two found each other again."

"As am I."

"Will, what is it that you do?" Mrs. Komeda asks.

"I'm a professor at the FBI Academy in Quantico, but recently, I've been assisting on cases."

“Are you working on those grizzly murders committed this week?”

Will nods, “Yes, I am.”

“Oh, dear. I don’t think I would be able to sleep at night.”

Will doubts that she’s worried about the Ripper. She most likely lives in an area that has never seen a crime more harmful than jaywalking. Definitely lives in a gated neighborhood and probably a gated property.

Hannibal comments, “There’s no need to be concerned. If Will is on the case, Baltimore is in great hands.”

Will takes a sip of his wine.

“Will, Alana has informed me that the two of you are friends.”

He nods and smiles at Alana, “Yeah, she was one of the first to welcome me to the Bureau. She, for whatever reason, finds my unsociable quirks endearing.”

“That I do,” She smiles.

Hannibal looks at the both of them, “I’m pleased with our mutual connections.”

“Sure makes the dinner parties go smoother,” Alana comments.

Will raises his eyebrows in agreement.

For a moment, they all enjoy their food rather than talk. It’s peaceful and not as awkward as Will imagined. However, soon another psychiatrist in the room begins speaking.

“Mr. Graham, you’re the one with the empathy disorder, correct?” The man asks.

Will is shocked by the bluntness of the question, “Excuse me?”

“Yeah, the professional psychology community has been quite interested in you. I’ve been part of many conversations about the way you think. One or two have been with our wonderful host. Didn’t know he knew you or I would’ve asked him to convince you to do an interview,” The guy laughs.

Will looks at Hannibal, whose focus is on the man. He’s not sure if others can notice but Hannibal’s mask slips slightly. Just enough for Will to be able to sneak a peek. Will sees how disgusted Hannibal is with the man’s table manners.

He looks back at the man, “I don’t do interviews.”

“Why not? What you have should be studied.”

“I don’t have anything but an active imagination.”

“You have more than that. From what I’ve heard, you have been showing up to crime scenes and just by looking at a dead body, you can know what the killer is thinking.”

“If you got your head out of other people’s asses, perhaps you’d be able to do the same,” Will’s mouth speaks on its own accord.

The man scoffs and looks at Hannibal for him to say something, but he doesn’t. He looks back at Will and attempts to make up a comeback, “Perhaps you should be put in an institute.”

“Perhaps it’s time for dessert,” Hannibal stands, “Will, would you assist?”

Will nods and Hannibal leads him to the kitchen. After the door shuts behind them, Hannibal walks over to the fridge and removes two platters of a frozen dessert. The two platters each plates of the dessert, totaling to the nine people at the table. He sets them down on the counter and turns to Will, “I sincerely apologize for that man’s behavior. He has tendencies to step out of line.”

“So you knew I was in town, working for the FBI?” Will asks.

“Yes, I did.”

“Yet you acted as if you didn’t.”

Hannibal picks up a tray, “I wanted to see if you would lie to me.”

“What did you think I’d do?”

“When we first met, you surprised me. The second time we met, again, you surprised me. I don’t think it’s a smart idea to attempt to predict you, William,” He hands Will a platter, “Though, I hoped you would tell the truth, and you did.”

Will holds the tray and looks into Hannibal’s eyes. He can’t help but wonder if he purposefully invited the irritable man to see if he’d be rude to Will. Hannibal isn’t the type to invite a ticking bomb to a party without an agenda.

He leans in close to Hannibal’s ear, “Your mask is slipping.”

Hannibal smirks and returns to the task at hand, “Shall we return?”

He nods and the two of them carry the platters into the dining room. They remove the plates from the platter and set them down in front of each person. Afterward, they return to their seats and enjoy the dessert for themselves. Hannibal has a conversation with Mrs. Komeda and Alana, while Will enjoys his dessert, thinking about the organ harvester case.

‘Or the Ripper’s making sausage.’

Hearts, kidneys, livers, lungs, intestines. Four bodies.

‘Before we begin, you must all be warned: Nothing here is vegetarian .’

A large dinner party serving chicken liver pâté, braised beef lungs, Parmesan crumbled lamb brains, and other dishes with the primary ingredient being meat.

Will sets his fork down and politely excuses himself to the restroom. He stands up, palms getting sweaty and his skin turning slightly off colored. Will leaves the dining room. Hannibal's eyes follow Will out. Once outside of the dining room, he asks one of the server for directions. They point it out for him. He thanks them and goes to the bathroom.

He locks the door behind and quickly kneels down by the toilet. Everything is telling him to throw it up, but he is unable to do it. His body begins to sweat and ringing begins in his ears. He falls back, getting off his knees, and scoots against the wall. Will brings his knees to his chest and holds himself, while trying to calm his breath which has suddenly quickened pace.

Meanwhile, Hannibal wraps up the dinner party after noticing Will's onset of panic. Quickly but not in a rude manner, he manages to get people out of his home. When everyone is out of his home, including the servers, Hannibal goes to the bathroom and knocks on the door.

"Will, are you alright?" He asks.

No response from Will.

"Open the door, William."

There's still nothing.

Hannibal leaves the door for a moment and comes back. With ease, he picks the lock and opens the door. In the corner of the bathroom, pushed up against the wall, Will is still holding his knees to his chest. It doesn't take but a second for Hannibal to be on his knees in front of Will.

He places his hands on both sides of Will's face and speaks softly, "Will, look at me."

Will's eyes lift in obedience to Hannibal.

Hannibal feels Will's forehead. Doesn't take a genius to understand that Will is having a panic attack. Hannibal gently strokes Will's hair and begins giving Will breathing instructions. With someone else helping him, Will is able to regulate his breath. Even if that someone is the reason for the panic attack.

Hannibal stands up and goes over to the sink. He gets a washcloth from the cabinets underneath and wets it with cool water. He squats down beside Will and holds the cloth against the back of Will's neck. Gradually, it begins to cool Will off. Hannibal wraps his available arm around Will, holding him gently.

Will comes to and suddenly feels extremely awkward and uncomfortable with the current situation. He uses the wall as support to stand up. Hannibal stays at his side in case.

"I'm going to go," Will says, trying to walk out.

Hannibal grabs Will's wrist, "You're going to sit down until you've recovered. Driving in your state is dangerous."

Will's fight or flight sense is punching him in face right now, but he goes along with Hannibal's suggestion. He supposes the third F, freeze, won the battle. Hannibal takes him into the kitchen and pulls up a chair for him to sit down at the kitchen island. Will takes a seat. Hannibal goes over to the cabinets and retrieves a teacup. For Will, Hannibal makes tea. After it's made, he sets it down in front of Will.

Will looks down at the tea, just staring at it. Hannibal observes him. Will picks up the cup and blows on it before sipping.

"I ask this at the risk another panic attack, but would you tell me what is the cause? I'm only better equipped to help you if I'm aware of the root of the problem," Hannibal stands across the island.

"The food is human meat, isn't it?" Will looks up at Hannibal.

Chapter 6

“Human meat?” Hannibal appears confused.

Will nods.

Hannibal scoffs an offended laugh, “Will, with each meeting, you think of me as more of a monster than the last. I have done nothing to prompt these assumptions, yet you continue to add to the list.”

“There is too much circumstantial evidence for you not to be what I claim you are.”

“Listen to what you’re saying. Remember why you had to let me go in Florence. Circumstantial evidence isn’t proof. If you truly had reason to suspect me, you would have informed the FBI.”

Will puts his head into his hands and replies, “I know.”

“You’re pushing yourself past boundaries that you know you shouldn’t cross. It’s harming you in the process. You look more exhausted than a few days ago.”

“I’m fine,” He drags his hands down his face and stands, “May I leave now?”

“May I walk you to your car?”

Will walks out of the kitchen, knowing that if Hannibal wants to follow that he will. Hannibal follows. They walk together to Will’s car. Hannibal takes notice of the scuff marks and looks around at Will.

“Were you in an accident?” Hannibal’s voice is concerned.

“Not with another car. Swerved to miss something and drove into a ditch,” Will unlocks his car and gets in.

He starts the car and rolls the window down.

“Were you able to avoid whatever was in the road?”

“Mm, yeah. Didn’t see anything when I got out.”

“If this event occurs another time, you should hit it. Rather it is dead than you.”

-

Will looks around in his chair. He doesn’t remember getting there, but he looks down and is in his white t-shirt and shorts with a cup of whiskey beside him. No matter how hard he attempts to recollect the drive back from Hannibal’s and the time after he got home, he’s unable.

He checks the time. It's about two in the morning. Will stands up and walks over to his bed. He just lays down without questioning what happened any further. If something is wrong, he doesn't want to admit it right now.

Until five thirty, he's able to sleep. After he wakes up, he gets ready for work and makes a cup of coffee. The drive to work is uneventful, much like his work for the day. Thankful, after back to back cases, he has a relaxing day of teaching. No socializing. Just talking at people. While he's still surrounded by reminders of others killers and the Chesapeake Ripper, it's a bit easier being on the sidelines.

He gets a few days into the week before he's summoned once more by Jack. The murder is a brutal mutilation of a trombone player, displayed at the center of the theater. There's no dissection so the Chesapeake Ripper is ruled out. The victim was found with the neck of a violin jammed down his throat. Vocal cords exposed to the world, his throat is cut open. Powder is left on the wounds, indicating that the victim's throat was played like a violin.

The vocal cords were cut down to where they lacked fat and non-muscular tissue. They were treated with a sulfur dioxide solution that hardened the vocal cords.

Will stares at the body that lays on the forensics lab table as he says, "The killer wanted to open him up to get a decent sound out of him."

Beverly inspects the vocal cords, "He treated the vocal cords the same way you treat catgut string."

"We should be looking for musicians, people who make instruments, and anyone who attended this man's last performance," Will pauses, "He's killed before. Not in this way though. He's… trying a new instrument."

"So it's a performance," Jack swallows.

"Another psycho with a love of theatrics," Zeller says.

Price finishes, "What could go wrong?"

"Alright, let's look at the list of those who attended and check if any of them are musicians or have a background in making instruments," Jack orders.

Beverly gets started on that. Will walks over to her but then his phone rings. He looks down at the caller ID and it says Hannibal Lecter. He chooses to ignore it. Beverly looks over at him but doesn't mention the call, "If it's a performance, who's his audience?"

Will takes a moment to think, "I don't know. Patron of the arts. Fellow musician. Or another killer."

Another psycho with a love of theatrics , perhaps the other killer is no other than the king of theatrics.

Will debates returning Hannibal's call, but decides against it.

She sighs, “A serenade.”

He returns back to class. To pass time, he grades assignments and updates any lesson plans. A nice surprise appears in his classroom as students are leaving, Alana Bloom.

Alana walks over to his desk with a smile, “Hello, Will.”

He returns a small smile, “What brings you to my humble abode?”

“Wanted to check on you. You looked sick at Hannibal’s dinner party.”

“Oh. I’m fine. Think the socializing got to my nerves.”

“I’m proud you even went. You looked good, by the way.”

He wishes he could take her words to heart but he can’t help feel that those words have been tainted due to Hannibal complimenting him the same way.

“Thank you,” Will forces another smile.

“Would you like to go out for a drink?”

Will rubs the side of his face, “Uh, not tonight. I think I need some sleep.”

“That’s okay. You do that. I’ll see you later, Will.”

“See you,” He nods.

She leaves with one last smile. Will lets out a groan when the door closes behind her. He should’ve gotten a drink with her. He debates going after her and changing the plan.

Will gets up from his desk and jogs to the door. A student holds it open for him. He goes out and looks both ways down the hallway until he sees Alana.

Spotting her, he calls out, “Alana!”

Alana turns around.

He hurries over to her, “Let’s get that drink.”

The two go to a bar nearby the field office. She orders a beer and Will asks for a glass of whiskey. They make a small toast and drink.

“I’m glad you changed your mind. I enjoy your company.”

Will laughs, “My company?”

“Yes, your company,” She chuckles.

“Makes you one of few.”

“Well us few make up for all the others,” She sips her beer, “You have me, Beverly, Jack—“

“—Jack likes my assistance on cases. Not my company.”

“You have Hannibal too. He sings praises about you.”

“Hannibal is complicated.”

“Then you have me and Beverly.”

Will drinks his whiskey, “And that’s all I need.”

“I’m flattered.”

A silence passes before Alana makes the tone slightly serious.

“How have you been, Will? You’ve been tossed into Jack’s lion den. Has to take a toll.”

“I, uh, I’m complicated.”

“Lots of complications in your life.”

He sighs, “That seems to be the case.”

“You sleeping ok?”

“Not really, no. I practically share the bed with nightmares.”

“Would you like to discuss them?”

“You don’t need to be my therapist, Alana.”

“I’m not trying to be.”

“Okay, well, my dreams are about the Chesapeake Ripper. His victims. Him mocking other killers. Him murdering me. That sort of thing.”

“If you’re experiencing these things every night, Will, you need to take a break. You need to step away.”

Will shakes his head, “That won’t fix anything.”

“You can’t let these killers in. They’ll eat you alive.”

He can’t help but laugh, “Eat me alive… Alana, the only killer I have in my head is the Ripper. No amount of stepping away will do anything. He will just bring me back in.”

“You speak as if you know him.”

“I know him more than you think I might.”

“Your empathy doesn’t create a relationship between you and the killers. You shouldn’t be connecting with them. You’re supposed to temporarily understand them and break away.”

“With understanding comes connection.”

“You’re a smart ass sometimes, you know that?” She laughs.

He shrugs with a grin, “I do what I do.”

“I just hope you know that if you ever need to call someone at one in the morning, my phone is on.”

Will doesn’t know how to respond so he just nods and flips the topic, “Want to order mozzarella sticks?”

They both smile in sync and order some food. After they eat, Will pays for the meal, despite Alana insisting. He walks her to her car. When they’re at her car, they awkwardly stand next to each other for a second.

“You know this is the first time we’ve been alone together?” Will points out, “You’ve avoided it since we met. Smoothly done too.”

“Evidently not smooth enough.”

“Now you asked me out for drinks.”

“I thought it would be a nice way to get you some fresh air.”

“Did you?”

“Something like that, yeah.”

“Something like that,” He repeats quietly.

Will leans forward and kisses her as a sudden boost of confidence flows through his veins. For a second, Alana hesitates but then she returns the kiss. There’s a moment of passion and intimacy shared between them before Alana breaks away.

“Will, I don’t know if we should. I can’t help but feel that this is you trying to cling to something stable.”

“I’m not your patient.”

Will kisses her again and she doesn’t resist.

Alana replies, “I know, but I have a curiosity about you. I wouldn’t be able to stop analyzing you. These situations… I’d overthink them. I’d wonder if it’s true affection or a coping mechanism.”

He doesn’t respond.

“If I were my patient, my advice would be to not do this. I have to take my advice. I’m going to go ahead and go. Goodnight, Will.”

Alana gets inside her car and Will takes a step away to give her room to drive off. The engine turning on fills the air and soon after, the car departs. Will is left alone in the parking lot. He drags his hand through his hair, embarrassed with himself. He feels called out, but he didn’t think that he was wanting to kiss Alana as an attempt to help himself. Though, he wouldn’t feel guilty if there wasn’t a sense of truth to what she said.

You have stability, William. I’m here in front of you. Come to me when you need, and I am there. Come to me, dear Will. Allow me to be your balance.

Will finds himself at Hannibal’s door, ringing the doorbell. However, he doesn’t remember getting there. There’s no answer and it’s cold outside so Will enters the foyer of Hannibal’s home. He takes off his coat and is met by Hannibal.

He tosses his coat onto a nearby chair and Hannibal looks at him curiously.

“I kissed Alana Bloom,” He walks past Hannibal.

Hannibal’s mouth slightly hangs open, “Well, come in.”

He follows Will, who walks into his dining room. Will immediately notices the dining table is set for two and that the back door is open.

“You have a guest?” Will asks.

Hannibal walks past him to shut the door, “A colleague. You just missed him.”

“Didn’t finish his dinner.”

“An urgent call of some sorts. He had to leave suddenly. It benefits you because I have dessert for two,” Hannibal begins to walk to the kitchen but pauses to look at Will, “If you would like some.”

“Depends what’s in it.”

Hannibal makes his way into the kitchen. He grabs a towel off the counter and uses it to take the dessert out of the oven. Will stands on the other side of the island.

“Tell me, what was Alana’s reaction?” Hannibal asks as he sets the dessert on the counter.

“Said it was me reaching for stability. That we shouldn’t continue because she would never know if I meant it or if it was me wanting a crutch.”

“I don’t disagree. She’d overanalyze everything you did, and you would resent her for it.”

“I know.”

Plating the food, Hannibal replies, “Wondering then why you kissed her and felt compelled to drive an hour in the snow to tell me about it.”

“I don’t know.”

“Don’t know what?”

“Why I’m here. I don’t remember leaving there and coming here. Don’t know why I would.”

“Perhaps Alana struck a little too close to home?”

Will puts his hands on his hips, “I’m not—“

“Not what, Will?”

“I’m not unstable. I’m not,” Will replies in a way that’s more talking to himself than he is to Hannibal.

“You said you don’t remember coming here. Have you had other periods of lost time?”

Will nods, “Only one other time. When I left dinner.”

“Experiencing any other troubles?”

“Nightmares. Headaches. Hearing things. You name it, I got it.”

“Kissing her as a clutch for balance doesn’t seem too far off.”

Will is silent, staring at his hands. Hannibal pours a bottle of wine into two glasses, sliding one to Will.

“Might I confide in you, Will?”

Will looks up at Hannibal, eyebrows scrunched slightly. He takes the wine and sips it.

“I hesitate telling you this as it borders on a violation of doctor-patient confidentiality. A patient told me today he suspects a friend of his may be involved with the murder at the symphony,” Hannibal folds the kitchen towel.

Will nods and rubs his face, “Right, um, what did he say about his friend?”

“He owns a music store in Baltimore, specializing in string instruments. Perhaps you should interview him.”

Hannibal looks down at him with concerned eyes that mask their slyness. Will can’t help but feel Hannibal is feeding him to the lions.

“And who is this friend?”

“Tobias Budge.”

“Trying to earn yourself brownie points?”

“Your trust would be a bonus I’d gladly accept, but no, I’m worried for my patient’s safety.”

“What did Budge say?”

Hannibal’s eyes lose their concern and turn dark, showing nothing except emptiness.

“That he was going to cut someone’s throat and play it like a violin.”

“That does fit the description of the murder.”

Without Will realizing it, Hannibal has made it over to Will’s side of the kitchen island. Face to face, Hannibal stands where Will has to look Hannibal in the eyes or stare at his feet. Will’s eyes act on their own accord and make eye contact with Hannibal.

Hannibal’s voice whispers to Will, “Was it beautiful, Will? Could you hear its sound? Its design?”

Will swallows and like he’s been hypnotized, says, “Yes, it was. I hear its serenade every time I close my eyes. My mind has become its resting place.”

Hannibal lifts his hand to Will’s cheek and holds his face.

“Your mind bewilders me. How I wish I could view the world as you do.”

Will leans into Hannibal’s hand, eyes closed.

“You’re exhausted, Will. Have you been sleeping?”

He shakes his head, “I can’t.”

“Nightmares?”

He nods, “Of you.”

“What about me?” Hannibal asks.

“You killing me.”

“I won’t tonight if it makes you feel better.”

“Thank you,” Will mumbles as he slips into Hannibal’s grasp.

Hannibal holds onto him, keeping him from falling. He picks Will up into his arms and carries him upstairs. Will is placed into a bed located in one of Hannibal’s guest rooms. Hannibal takes off Will’s shoes and places them side by side next to the bed. He tucks Will in gently under the covers and for a moment just watches him. Hannibal leans over Will, smelling his hair. He takes a deep breath and leaves the room, shutting the door behind himself.

Chapter 7

Will is able to sleep through the night, for the first time in a while, peacefully. Maybe it was Hannibal's reassurance that he wasn't going to kill him that night. Maybe it was the expensive mattress and sheets. Maybe it was that his wine might have been spiked so that he could rest. Either way, he's able to sleep through the night without any nightmares.

He can't help but wake up early however. Will is up at around five in the morning, like usual. When he wakes up, he is completely confused about where he is. He looks out the window and sees a beautiful neighborhood, reminding him of where he is. Will sighs, now wondering why he's still here. Did he fall asleep? He didn't think he was that tired. Perhaps he was.

Will puts on his shoes and quietly makes his way down the hallway. He debates looking for Hannibal's room, curious as to what his room looks like. Though, it's probably the same as his room in Florence. Bland. Lacking any personality. Incredibly put together.

He decides against it and makes his way downstairs. The sun has still not fully risen. Only now does it begin to peak over the horizon. Will wants to snoop. He truly does, especially the kitchen. He walks into the kitchen and looks in the fridge. Nothing out of the ordinary. Just organic foods and leftovers. Will wonders if Hannibal has ever had Doritos or pizza rolls.

Will looks through drawers, finding much kitchen supplies. Half of it, he doesn't know why Hannibal would need. Will cooks plenty and only uses the basics. He walks over to the pantry door and tries to open it, but realizes it's locked. Now that is something that Will is curious about.

Quickly, he grabs a knife and tries to open up the pantry door by sliding it in between the door and doorframe. Will attempts to unlock the door without scratching the paint or wood. He manages to open the door with enough struggle. It pushes open slightly after it's breached.

"I would've unlocked the door if you asked," Hannibal's voice says behind him.

Will freezes in fear as nerves crawl up his spine. He grips the knife tightly in his fist, preparing for the worst.

Hannibal pushes open the pantry door further for Will.

"Go on, Will. Go inside if that's what you want."

Will doesn't look back at Hannibal but he does step inside the pantry, still holding the knife. As he steps in, he is met with bottles of wine lining the walls. To his left is a refrigerator. Will approaches it, looking at what's inside. There are cheeses. There are jars. There are also sealed meats.

He opens the fridge and picks one piece of meat up. It looks like pork loin. Another meat looks like a heart. There's also sausage. Will turns around quickly and holds the knife up at

Hannibal, who stands there hands in his plaid pajama pockets. His head tilts at Will's response.

"Don't move, Dr. Lecter," Will demands.

Hannibal doesn't respond. Instead, he just looks at Will.

Will lifts the knife further up, level of Hannibal's throat. Hannibal smirks, "Are you going to kill me, William?"

"I'm going to call Jack."

"About what?"

"You're a cannibal."

Hannibal smiles, showing teeth, "Will, by all means, take my food and have it tested. You'll find pork and beef."

Will shakes his head, "You're trying to confuse me."

Hannibal takes a few steps forward so that the knife is at his neck.

"If I had something to hide, I would've stopped you before you opened that door. You must pay closer attention to your surroundings. If I was a cannibalistic killer, like you say I am, I would've choked you from behind until you were unconscious. From there, I would lock you away and slowly carve steaks off of you, savoring you, for as long as your body dares to take a breath. I imagine you taste sweet."

Will hand shakes slightly and sweat begins to break the surface of his skin. Hannibal puts his hand on Will's wrist, pulling the knife lower. His other hand removes the knife from Will's grasp.

"I have the receipts from my butcher, if you want to see," Hannibal tucks the knife in his pocket, "While you verify, I'm going to prepare a protein scramble."

Hannibal leaves the pantry and finds his receipts. He lays them on the counter for Will to inspect. Will steps out of the pantry and picks up the receipts. While Will does that, Hannibal cooks eggs and toast as well as some sausage.

Will sits there in disbelief, feeling as if he's losing his mind. He's not crazy but this chase after Hannibal makes him so. He puts the receipts down and zones out.

Hannibal sets coffee down in front of him while he finishes the breakfast. Before putting any sausage on Will's plate, he asks, "Would you care for some or will you have another panic attack in my bathroom?"

It takes him a second to reply but he ends up agreeing to have some sausage. Without a doubt, this pleases Hannibal. Hannibal puts a plate of breakfast in front of Will at the island

and sets down a plate in front of himself. Will eats, not touching the sausage at first. Hannibal watches Will as he takes bites.

Will gets the courage to eat the sausage on the plate without having a panic attack. Whether it's beef or human, he must admit it tastes amazing. It sickens him to think that he could be eating a victim but he keeps eating. Hannibal eats without any shame or hesitation.

"I'm going to call Jack on my way to work. Tell him about Budge. We will go by his shop later," Will says as he sips coffee.

"Good."

"Well, thank you for the coffee, and food. I'm going to get going."

"I'll walk you to your car."

Will nods and Hannibal escorts him outside. When Will is at his car, he is able to take in Hannibal's appearance for the first time. Hannibal is dressed in a red sweatshirt and matching plaid pajama pants. It's odd seeing Hannibal so relaxed, but it's almost a comforting sight.

Without much thought, words come out of Will's mouth, "You look good, Hannibal."

A light seems to flicker in Hannibal's eyes. He doesn't smile, but instead, replies, "Remember what I told you, William. Pay closer attention to your surroundings."

Will squints his eyes at Hannibal, concern growing in his gut. He nods softly and gets in his car. Hannibal walks to his front door as Will drives away. He goes inside when Will is out of sight and shuts the door behind him.

When Will drives to work, he alerts Jack of what Hannibal told him. After arriving, he, Jack, and Beverly do what they can with researching Tobias Budge and his shop. Budge holds no priors and only good reviews for his shop. Jack sends Will and two officers to go inspect Budge's shop, as he's been called to attend a meeting.

Will doesn't reject the opportunity to go out on his own. He's done it before. Not for the FBI but when he was a police officer. Arriving at Tobias Bridge's shop, he walks in with the two officers. Tobias is escorting a student out as they walk in.

"Special Agent Will Graham with the FBI. Are you the owner?" Will looks at Tobias through the top of his glasses.

"Yes, Tobias Budge. I'm just showing one of my students out. Can you give me a moment?" Tobias asks.

Will nods. Tobias guides the student outside, telling him his homework while he does so.

"What can I help you with?"

"We're investigating the death of Douglas Wilson. He was a—"

“The trombonist,” Tobias interrupts.

“Did you know him?”

“I was aware of him. Baltimore’s a small town and its cultural arts community is even smaller.”

“That’s why we’re here, Mr. Budge.”

Tobias messes with a display cello, “I hear someone cut his throat and tried to play it with a bow.”

“Why do you say try?”

“String have to be treated. You can’t just open somebody up and run a bow across their innards and expect to produce a sound.”

“The vocal chords were treated chemically the same way as catgut string. We kept those details out of the press,” A loud screech of a violin plays in Will’s head.

“Something wrong?” Tobias asks.

Will shakes his head, “No, I just– Excuse me a minute.”

He steps outside as the violin gets louder, taking over his thoughts. Will runs into the street and nearly gets hit by a car, which reels him into reality. He pops an aspirin into his mouth. After a minute, he goes back inside the shop to find the officers and Tobias missing. Will unholsters his gun and moves toward the practice room.

In the room, he finds an officer with a cello rod jammed under his neck, coming through the top of his head. Will calls for backup and an ambulance. He hears a sound coming from a doorway. Will follows the sound down to a basement, where he finds a room dedicated to the art and smell of making catgut string. Strung up along the room are intestines, drying.

Will hears water trickling in one corner of the room. He slowly approaches a curtained off area where the sound is coming from. As he pulls back the curtain, he sees the second officer with metal strings pulled around his face, cutting deep into his skin.

From behind, Tobias attempts to do the same to Will, but Will manages to slip his arms between him and the wire. The two struggle for a second. With the strength he can muster, Will brings the gun up high and shoots at Tobias. Unfortunately, he only hits him in the ear and almost deafens them both in the process. Tobias lets go of Will and runs for the stairs. Will tries to chase and shoot at Tobias but the gun shot has thrown off his sense of balance, making him unable to do either thing.

Will falls onto the ground, just laying there until the police arrive. The room spins and he zones out to the smell of organs in the stale air. He imagines death will feel similar to his current hopelessness.

Meanwhile, Hannibal is at his office, giving the friend of Tobias a referral. During the appointment, they're interrupted by a bloody Tobias. The patient, Franklyn, stands up and looks at Tobias with the utmost concern.

"Tobias?" Franklyn whispers as he stands.

Tobias walks further into Hannibal's office, "I came to say goodbye, Franklyn."

Hannibal stands.

"What do you mean goodbye? Oh my god. Is that your blood?"

"I just killed two men. The FBI came to question me about the murder," Tobias states.

Hannibal's attention is grabbed as he wonders if one of those men were Will.

"You have to turn yourself in. This plane is going down. Let it be a controlled descent. You can get back up in the air again. There's rehabilitation for everyone," Franklyn tries to calm Tobias down.

"Franklyn, I want you to leave now," Hannibal demands.

Tobias counters, "Stay right where you are, Franklyn."

Franklyn steps closer to Tobias, hands extended.

"You've done something horrible and I know you wish to god you didn't, but you did and there's nothing you can do to change that. Only thing you can change is your future. Right? Now, you're probably scared. You probably feel like you're all alone."

"I'm not alone."

Hannibal stares at Tobias after his response.

"That's right. You're not alone. Nothing has happened in our friendship that you and I can't–"

Hannibal comes up behind Franklyn and snaps his neck with ease. Franklyn's lifeless body drops to the ground. For a second, Hannibal looks down at Franklyn, but his attention is soon brought toward Tobias.

"I was looking forward to that," Tobias says with a slight frown.

"I know," Hannibal replies.

Tobias pulls out a wire string, beginning to spin it quickly. Hannibal backs up, making distance between him and Tobias. Tobias begins slinging the wire around like a whip until it finally strikes Hannibal, wrapping around his forearm. The wire cuts into Hannibal's suit then his skin. Hannibal attempts to punch Tobias but Tobias dodges it, pushing Hannibal past him.

A glass table is grabbed by Tobias and slammed against Hannibal's side, shattering the glass. Hannibal manages to land a punch and then a headbutt on Tobias. Getting hold of Tobias's shirt collar, Hannibal throws Tobias into his desk. Tobias quickly grabs a letter opener, but Hannibal tackles him fully over the desk. They roll onto the ground and Tobias, still holding the letter opener, kicks Hannibal in the face.

Tobias begins slicing the air in an attempt to cut Hannibal. He manages to stab Hannibal in the thigh, which causes Hannibal to grunt in pain. Tobias pulls out the letter opener and takes hold of Hannibal by the throat, pinning him against his desk. He tries to stab Hannibal in the face with the letter opener, but Hannibal is able to grab a pencil, which he uses to stick into Tobias's arm.

The letter opener is dropped. Hannibal gets in a good elbow hit to Tobias's collarbone before Tobias hits Hannibal in the jaw then a kick in the gut. The two exchange blows. Hannibal eventually knocks Tobias to the ground, but Tobias recovers quickly. He delivers several hits on Hannibal, backing him up against the ladder to the upper-level library.

Hannibal is kicked back into the ladder. He looks at Tobias with a bloody lip and nose as Tobias prepares to throw another punch at Hannibal's face. Right before there's an impact, Hannibal dodges, causing Tobias's arm to go through the ladder. Quickly, Hannibal grabs hold of his arm and bends it backward at the elbow, snapping it.

A scream is let out by Tobias. Tobias attempts to pathetically swing his other arm at Hannibal, but Hannibal hits him in his throat, causing him to choke. Tobias falls to his knees, coughing and unable to breathe. Hannibal looks around and grabs a nearby stag statue, using a handkerchief to hold it. He lifts it above his head and brings it down on Tobias's skull.

Hannibal drops the statues and knocks over the stand that the statue was on. He limps over, out of breath, to his desk chair. It takes him a minute to recover enough to dial 911. Hannibal reports that he was attacked and that he killed, in self-defense, the symphony murderer. After the call is over, Hannibal falls asleep from exhaustion until the police and paramedics arrive.

Eventually, the FBI shows up. They begin putting the bodies into body bags. By this time, a paramedic has treated Hannibal's stab wound in his leg. He sits in his desk chair still. Hannibal looks up when someone enters the room. It's Jack Crawford. A flash of disappointment and worry falls across Hannibal's face until Will comes into the room behind Jack.

Once Will is in his sights, Hannibal is relieved. Will stares at the body bags for a moment before walking over to Hannibal. When he approaches Hannibal, Hannibal is slightly teary-eyed.

"I was worried you were dead," Hannibal speaks softly.

Will examines Hannibal's face and injuries from a few feet away. Before Will can respond, Jack approaches the two of them.

"Tobias Budge killed two Baltimore police officers. Almost killed an FBI special agent, and after all of that, his first stop is here," Jack states with an accusatory tone.

“He came to kill my patient,” Hannibal explains.

While Will enjoys seeing someone else view Hannibal as guilty, he replies, “Hannibal’s patient told him he suspected a friend was involved with the murder at the symphony. Hannibal told me. I investigated.”

“Franklyn knew more than he was telling me. He told Mr. Budge that he didn’t have to kill anymore. Then he broke Franklyn’s neck. Then he attacked me.”

Jack confirms, “And then you killed him?”

Will looks at Jack then Hannibal.

Hannibal nods, “Yes.”

Music to Will’s ears. A simple yes has given Will energy.

Jack makes an unsure noise and walks away.

Hannibal looks over at Will, who comes over and sits on Hannibal’s desk next to him. He looks at Hannibal’s battered face and feels a warmth inside his chest. Carefully, Will places a hand against Hannibal’s cheek and lifts his chin upwards. Hannibal allows him to do whatever, following his lead.

Will gets a strange urge to close the space between them, so he lets go entirely. He takes a deep breath, “Do you need a ride home?”

“A ride home would be appreciated.”

“Beverly is going to come over and take a few samples, then I’ll take you.”

Hannibal nods.

Will motions to Beverly for her to come over. When she walks over and begins taking DNA swabs and samples from Hannibal, Will analyzes the scene. He closes his eyes and attempts to envision the murders.

Tobias breaks Franklyn’s neck…

A statue falls on Tobias’s head during the fight, killing him…

It doesn’t make sense.

Will gets an uneasy feeling about how the scene is displayed. The locations of the bodies don’t make sense. He decides to bring it up to Hannibal once they leave the office. He looks over at Hannibal while Beverly is with him and notices Hannibal has been watching him the whole time. Beverly finishes up and asks Hannibal if he needs anything. He shakes his head and thanks her.

Will comes back over to Hannibal and offers him his arm for assistance to get up. Hannibal uses the help. Will walks with him to his car, “I’d drive you home in your car, but I don’t want to be responsible if I wreck it.”

“That’s alright.”

Hannibal gets inside Will’s car and Will shuts the door for him. Will gets in the driver’s side and begins driving Hannibal to his home which isn’t a long drive. It’s under ten minutes away. When they arrive, Will helps Hannibal inside the kitchen, at his request.

“I find a nice glass of wine would be appropriate in my current state. Would you care for some?” Hannibal limps to the cabinet to get two glasses out. Then he goes to his pantry, which is still unlocked from earlier, and grabs a bottle of wine.

Will nods, “Do you want me to pour them?”

“If you wish to.”

He walks over to Hannibal and uncorks the bottle. Carefully, he pours the wine into two glasses. He puts more than Hannibal would have but Hannibal doesn’t seem to mind that right now. Will seals the bottle with a pop-on cork and sets it aside.

The two raise their glasses and toast to catching Tobias. They sip on their wine in a quiet peacefulness. Will feels like his standard for alcohol is being set so high that he doesn’t know he will ever be able to return to cheap grocery store wine.

Hannibal clears his throat before speaking due to, well, getting thrown around like crazy earlier, “Will, I know you’re itching with questions. You won’t offend me.”

Will swirls his wine, looking down at the glass, “The scene didn’t look right. Not when I was reconstructing it. Not according to your statement.”

“What was wrong with it?” Hannibal takes a sip of his wine.

“If Tobias snapped Franklyn’s neck, Franklyn must’ve stepped past you. You aren’t stupid. You know why he was there. You let him die. However, you should’ve taken that as an opportunity to run… which you didn’t. Which means you either wanted to fight Tobias or you killed Franklyn and wanted to fight.

“Continue.”

“Tobias was killed because of the statue. The scene looks like it happened during a tussle, probably fell on his head. Fight over. But it was too… clean, perhaps. I just know Tobias didn’t die in the fight. That statue was raised above his head and he was killed. You could’ve immobilized him but you didn’t. You wanted him dead, which brings me back to my first point.”

Hannibal listens to Will with a small smile, amazed by his mind.

“Are you going to comment or just stand there?” Will asks with an attitude.

Hannibal takes a sip of his wine. He takes a deep breath after and sets down the glass onto the counter. He looks forward at Will, staring deep into his eyes.

“I snapped Franklyn’s neck. I didn’t run, because I wanted to kill Tobias. When I saw my opportunity, I picked up the statue and I brought it down upon his head. Then I heard his skull crack and I was satisfied. I sat down and called 911.”

Will takes a step back into the counter. His blinking becomes more rapid, as he doesn’t know how to handle the situation.

“Why– Why are you admitting it?”

“You wanted me to comment, so I did.”

“Hannibal,” Will drags his hands down his face, “I don’t know what to do with this information.”

“You mustn’t do anything,” Hannibal closes the distance between them and holds Will’s face in his hands, “Will, I want you to think about why I killed them.”

Will looks into Hannibal’s eyes. While his own eyes resemble a worried puppy, Hannibal’s are confident. As he looks further into Hannibal’s eyes, into Hannibal’s mind, he feels like he’s being drowned. He feels smothered in darkness. Simultaneously, he feels as if he gains an understanding of Hannibal. The understanding brings forth a connection which will come with consequences, but ones Will doesn’t mind looking past.

His mind and mouth move as one concurrent flow, “You killed Franklyn because of Tobias. When he came in, you thought he killed me, so you removed the possibility of pleasure from killing Franklyn away. That’s not all though… Tobias knew something about you. Something you don’t want anyone to know.”

Hannibal whispers with a smirk on his face, “What did he know?”

A serenade.

Another psycho with a love of theatrics.

“He knew what you are. He saw you do what you do best,” Will whispers, matching Hannibal’s tone.

“William,” Hannibal presses his forehead against Will’s and closes his eyes, “With every moment I’m around you, I ache more for insights into what your mind holds. Without fail, you continue to amaze me and to leave me in awe. Your mind… not just mind, but everything about you is captivating.”

Will feels weak and as if his body needs Hannibal for support. He melts into Hannibal’s hold, closing his eyes as well. Will’s empathy absorbs Hannibal’s longing for Will as longing for Hannibal. Hannibal feels the shift in Will’s mentality.

Hannibal brings Will's face slightly upward to gently kiss him. The kiss is passionate and careful. Hannibal doesn't want to push a boundary Will doesn't want crossed, so he keeps the kiss calm in case Will wants out. Will, however, isn't quite sure what he wants. He knows what Hannibal is, but for some reason, he wants to engage in the kiss.

Will allows himself to be overtaken by Hannibal. He assists in the process by kissing back. Hannibal takes it as a cue to push a boundary or two. He fastens the kiss, allowing the passion he feels toward Will to take over. Hannibal holds Will against the counter with his body weight. Will places his hands on Hannibal's hips.

Allow me to be your balance. Rest the weight that's been burdening you upon my shoulders. I will carry it until the end of the world for you. William, I am your anchor, if you so allow me. All you need to do is let me.

Chapter 8

“I do hate to stop this, dear William, but I need to sit down,” Hannibal smiles.

Will chuckles, “Yeah.”

Will assists Hannibal to the living room and sits him down in his chair. Will goes back to the kitchen, refills their wine glasses, and brings them to the living room. He sets a glass down by Hannibal, who has grabbed a notebook and pencil since Will left. Will takes a seat on the couch beside Hannibal’s chair.

He sips on his wine and looks over at Hannibal, who is sketching. Occasionally, Hannibal will look up at Will then look back down. Will leans back and just watches Hannibal.

After a while, Hannibal carefully plucks a piece of paper from his drawing pad and hands it to Will. It’s a sketch of him sitting there. As Will looks at it, he can't help but wonder if he truly looks like that. The way Hannibal has drawn him makes him appear as beautiful as those in a Botticelli painting. Signed at the bottom in a lovely cursive is H.L. That impeccable handwriting that has haunted Will since day one. He rubs his thumb over the signature, thinking back on the first drawing he received from Hannibal.

“You’re thinking about Florence, aren’t you, Will?” Hannibal tilts his head, picking up his wine glass.

Will nods.

“I hope to return to Florence one day. Baltimore is a lovely city, but I do miss the architecture in Florence. Holds more cultural value than here.”

“Your admiration for aesthetics is in itself admirable.”

“Turned out to be a downfall of mine, didn't it?” Hannibal smiles just enough to show teeth.

“Are you admitting something, Hannibal?”

“No, as you now know, my admissions are much more straightforward.”

“Yes, they are,” Will drinks his wine, “How is your leg?”

“Feeling fine. Your company is the best medication I could have.”

Will rolls his eyes and stands, “Do you need anything before I go?”

Hannibal stands up with some struggle, “Would you help me to my room?”

“Is this a trick?” Will raises an eyebrow.

“No, it’s genuinely seeking assistance.”

Will helps him up the stairs, “You know it would be easier for you if you stayed on the first floor. Wouldn’t have to go back downstairs for food or water.”

“I enjoy a challenge.”

“Of course you do. Which door is it?”

Hannibal points out his door. Will opens it and helps Hannibal inside. Hannibal walks himself over to his bed, limping, and sits down. Will turns on a lamp and his eyes wander the room. Hannibal props his leg up and watches Will.

Will walks around the room, looking at different things. Again, lots of traditional Japanese paintings. There’s even what looks to be authentic samurai armor by the entrance.

“You’re not Japanese, so why such a fixation on the culture?” Will asks.

“My aunt was Japanese. When she took me in as a boy, she introduced me to the culture. She bestowed me some of her family heirlooms. One is the armor you see there,” He motions to the samurai armor.

Will picks up a picture frame off a shelf in Hannibal’s room. It’s of a little girl who has the small bone structure as Hannibal. Will squints at the picture and holds it up for Hannibal to explain.

Hannibal’s face turns genuinely glum. There’s no false act or mask. The picture saddens him and Will can see it.

“That is my sister, Mischa. She died when we were young.”

“Oh,” Will sets the picture down, “Sorry.”

“No need for apologies. Perhaps you can make it up to me by allowing me to look through your things.”

“If you want to drive all the way to Wolf Trap, by all means, go for it.”

Will looks at Hannibal’s face. His wounds have bruised and there’s some swelling. The cuts look bad but they will heal, probably without any scars. He walks over to Hannibal’s bedside.

Investigate the house while he’s down. Look in the pantry. Steal the meat from the fridge. Have Beverly test it. He can’t get you in this condition.

Something in Will’s eyes must’ve revealed what his mind was considering. Hannibal’s head tilts and he puts his hand on Will’s wrist.

“If you want to, do it. I’ll hold no ill will.”

“If I wanted to, would you tell me what I’d find before I do?”

“What do you think you’d find?”

“Answers.”

“Or lack of them.”

“Lack of answers can be an answer in itself.”

Hannibal sighs, “Dear Will, do what you must. I wish you would trust me though.”

“Trust you? I have never trusted you, and when have you given me a reason to?”

Hannibal sits up and faces Will. He holds Will’s hands, “When have I given you a reason not to?”

“I don’t know, how about when you killed two people today?”

“I openly admitted the truth to you.”

“You were a suspect for Il Mostro.”

“Only a suspect. Found innocent due to lack of evidence. I let you search my home then, and I’m letting you search my home now, Will.”

Will removes his hands, frustrated that Hannibal is right. Every time that Hannibal’s truthfulness has been in question, he has proven himself to be innocent or at least proven to be telling the truth. What is he supposed to do with that? How can he be frustrated with Hannibal’s lack of guilt? Why does his mind still believe Hannibal is guilty? He’s given no reason.

“You’re going to drive me insane, Hannibal,” Will mumbles.

You’re already being driven insane, William.

“I don’t know what you want me to do,” Hannibal says.

“Nothing– Do nothing. I’m going to go.”

“When will I see you again?”

“Sometime soon. Jack may need you to come down one day to give another statement.”

Hannibal nods, “Drive carefully, William.”

“Yeah,” Will leaves the room and quickly makes his way out of the house, not touching anything.

When Will leaves, Hannibal stands with ease and makes his way downstairs. He enters his pantry and checks on everything. Nothing removed. He smiles at Will’s good behavior. Hannibal grabs some meat out of the fridge and begins to prepare himself dinner.

While he cooks, he debates whether he should tell Will or not. Gaslighting can be a fun game, but Will is getting to the point that Hannibal wants him at and he doesn’t want to risk going

backwards. He wants Will to gain evidence on his own though. He wants Will to discover who he is. He wants Will to push boundaries to find out the truth before his mind eats himself from the inside out. Until then, Hannibal cannot reveal the full truth. For that, he's sorry.

Will returns to his home for the day. When he gets home, he crumbles up the drawing Hannibal gave to him today and throws it across the room. He kicks his shoes off and plops down onto the couch. For about an hour, he stares up at the ceiling. He doesn't even realize that he's done so until his phone goes off.

He snaps back into reality and answers the phone. It's Beverly.

"Hey," Will says.

"Hey, just wanted to update you on the symphony case."

"Mhmm."

"Your buddy Hannibal is clear. Should get off just fine. There'll be paperwork he will need to fill out, but surprisingly, that's all. It helps that he killed a killer, not an innocent."

"So Budge killed the patient?"

"Uh, yeah. His fingerprints were found on Franklyn's neck."

"And the statue that killed Budge?"

"Had some prints of Hannibal's but that's expected since it's his office, his decorations."

"Okay, does Jack need his number?"

"He already got it."

"Alright, well, I'll see you tomorrow."

"See you," Beverly says and hangs up.

Will sits there, thinking about what Beverly said. Hannibal planted evidence on Franklyn to secure his innocence. The methodical killer Will believes him to be is showing. Finally, it's showing. Will gets off the couch and walks over to the crumbled drawing. He sighs and picks it up, unfolding it.

He carries it over to the box he keeps the Primavera drawing. The drawing is put with the other and the box is shut after. Will tucks the box under the couch and makes his way to the bathroom to get ready for bed. He turns on the shower and steps in. As the cold water hits his head and runs down his back, his mind fades into a far-off land.

The breath of the cold fridge's air hits his face. As does the presence of a beast down his neck. He turns around to see Hannibal, eyes black. Growing from Hannibal's head are antlers. Hannibal reaches into Will's chest and pulls out his heart, which still beats in his hand.

Maintaining eye contact, Hannibal takes a bite out of Will's heart. Will looks down at his chest to see a big hole. He looks back up at Hannibal and begins to fall to the floor. Hannibal grabs him and steadies him on his feet.

Take mine, William— Hannibal whispers.

Hannibal reaches into his own chest to pull out his heart. Different from Will's, Hannibal's heart looks lifeless and doesn't beat. He sticks it into Will's chest and after a moment, the beating begins. Hannibal smiles at Will, blood in his teeth and around his lips.

Will lifts his hand to touch the gaping hole in Hannibal's chest. He pushes his hand into the empty cavity, able to touch the backside of Hannibal's body. Inside is nothing. Just a vast emptiness. Will pulls his hand out and looks up at Hannibal's eyes. Hannibal lifts Will's heart to Will's mouth.

Take a bite, William—

Will opens his mouth and Hannibal moves the heart slightly closer. Will bites down on the heart, tearing a chunk off the organ. Hannibal drops the heart. Its beating stops once it hits the ground. Hannibal's bloody hands cup Will's face and kisses him passionately. Their bloody mouths engage in a dance, binding them together like a pact.

A car honks. The horn is drawn out and loud. Will's ears hurt, hands brought up to cover them. The horn remains. His eyes open with difficulty and he sees headlights facing him. He lifts his hand to cover his eyes.

He's standing in the middle of a road. When he realizes, he waddles to the side. The car speeds off. Will looks up at the sky. The sun is a distant thought. Not knowing where he is, he decides to just pick a direction and walk.

Soon after his journey begins, a cop car pulls up next to him with their lights on. No siren though. The cop rolls down their passenger window and starts talking to Will through there.

"Hey, sir, are you alright?" One of the two cops asks.

They stop the car when Will stops walking.

Will shakes his head, "I don't know where I am."

They get out of the car.

"What's your name?" The second cop asks.

"Will Graham."

"Where do you live?"

"Wolf Trap, Virginia."

The first cop says, "We're in Wolf Trap, so that's good. You're close to home."

Will coughs, “Do you mind if I sit down? My feet are sore.”

“Why don’t we take you home?”

“Okay,” Will nods and realizes that he’s in his underwear so he brings his hands close to his body.

The cops sit him down in the backseat and wrap him in a blanket. They ask him some mandatory questions to get an assessment, “Are you on any drugs or medication? Prescription or otherwise.”

“No.”

“You’ve been drinking?”

“No.”

“Do you have a history of sleepwalking, Mr. Graham?”

“Not even sure if I’m awake now.”

The cop doesn’t know how to respond to that, so he just worries about getting Will home. The drive isn’t long. Will is dropped off at his home and escorted to his door. Once safely inside, the officers leave Will. He gets inside and locks his door, even moves a chair in front of it. Will yawns and walks over to his mattress. He lays down and sleeps for a few hours until the sun is up.

In the morning, he takes a shower and makes sure to scrub the bottom of his feet hard. His trip to work feels incredibly long as does his day at work. The entire day he dwells on his dream and how he sleep-walked all the way down the street.

In the upcoming weeks (four), Will does not see Hannibal. He dodges Hannibal’s calls, which is one every few days. However, in the last two weeks, Hannibal doesn’t attempt to contact Will. Hannibal isn’t sure why Will has decided to cut off contact, but neither is Will if he’s honest.

Will’s dreams are getting increasingly vivid somehow and he has been sleepwalking more. A few more times, Will has ended up outside his house. Once he was on the roof. He’s resulted to sleeping in a sleeping bag and placing things in front of his doors at night. As well as nightmares and sleepwalking, he is losing more bits of time. Nothing longer than a few hours but it’s becoming more frequent. During these periods of lost time, he is unable to remember anything but he continues whatever he was doing seemingly fine. He hasn’t told anyone about his increasing problems.

He decides to show up at Hannibal’s office on Wednesday at 7:30, hoping that he’s still there. When he drives up and sees the lights on, he feels a sort of relief. He’s not positive that Hannibal can help, but he knows Hannibal would be the only one who wouldn’t judge him and send him off to a psychiatric hospital.

Will walks inside the waiting room and then the office space. He doesn't bother to knock. Sitting at his desk is Hannibal who is looking up at Will. Hannibal stands in reaction. Will walks over to him and Hannibal meets him halfway.

"Are you free for the hour?" Will asks.

"I'm free for the night if that's what you need. Sit down, William."

Will sits down in the patient's chair and looks across at Hannibal, who has taken his seat.

"It's good to see you."

Hannibal crosses his legs, "You could've seen me at any point in the past few weeks. You chose not to."

"I know. Sorry, I've been… Out of it, to say the least."

Hannibal waits for Will to begin explaining.

"The nightmares have gotten worse. I've started sleepwalking as well. When I'm not walking around, I'm soaking my bed with sweat… I'm losing time. I can't remember things, like hours. I can't remember hours sometimes. I'll be at home and next thing I know I'm at work. I feel like I'm fading, Hannibal…"

There's silence from Hannibal. Whether it's reluctance to help or lack of knowing how to, Will can't tell.

"I apologize, but I don't know that I'm aware of how to assist such symptoms, Will. There are a load of possibilities. It might be caused by neurological problems or maybe mental illness."

Those last two words sting Will's heart.

"When you experience a loss of time, where does it typically begin?"

"At work."

"Good. Now, your nightmares. What is the primary subject in your nightmares?"

"Work, or you."

"Is that the reason for you not speaking to me?"

"Yes and no," Will takes a breath, "I hoped if I got away from you that they'd stop. Obviously they didn't."

"And the reason that you said no?"

"I was confused and didn't know how to feel about the kiss, which relates to the nightmares and my beliefs about you."

“If you’ve already tested separating yourself from the source of your problems and it has not worked, the only thing that I know to do is prescribe medication or for you to get a brain scan.”

“Brain scan?”

“To ensure it’s not a tumor.”

“I could have a tumor?”

“Or other things.”

“Okay, I want to get a brain scan,” Will says.

“Now if nothing is found, you must understand and accept that the problem is due to mental illness.”

“You sound like that’s what you want it to be.”

“I want answers, same as you. I’m simply preparing you for the possibilities.”

Will nods and looks at Hannibal. All of his injuries healed just fine. He looks strong like always. Will gets an urge to go to him and sink into his arms. He no longer wants to carry his problems alone. He feels weak.

Hannibal keeps the conversation going, “Would you tell me about your nightmares?”

He nods again and gives him details on a few of the bizarre ones. Hannibal can see Will reimagine the nightmares. The details Will gives almost put a smile on his face, but Hannibal manages to keep it at bay.

“What is your nightly routine?”

“Uh, drink some whiskey, sit on the couch for a minute, shower, brush teeth, sleep. Don’t say the whiskey is harming my sleep. I sleep badly no matter what.”

“Perhaps switching the whiskey for melatonin would help.”

“What’s your nightly routine, Doctor?”

“Dinner, nice glass of wine, read or draw until I am tired, then I go to bed.”

“Not too different from me.”

“Do you eat well, Will? Or do you survive off of microwaveable foods?”

“I eat well. Not so much recently though, because I haven’t had the energy to fish.”

“You fish?”

“That so shocking?”

“No, but I enjoy learning things about you,” Hannibal adjusts his seating position, “Would you like me to cook you fish for dinner?”

“Actually that would be nice. Will you make it simple or are you going to go over the top?”

“Whatever you want, I’ll do.”

“Just grill it— Can you grill?”

Hannibal looks at him with offended eyes, “Yes, I can grill.”

“I didn’t know. You see, I lived in Louisiana before I came here. That’s their thing down in the South. Grillin’. Fryin’. My expectations have been pushed high,” The little bit of a Southern accent he picked up comes out when saying the last words.

“I’m debating whether to take back my offer.”

“Sorry, sorry.”

“Would Friday night do?”

Will nods, “Yeah.”

“I’ll see you then,” Hannibal stands.

Will stands as well and walks himself to the door. Hannibal follows but maintains space between them. Will puts his hand on the doorknob and looks up at Hannibal. He wants Hannibal to hold him like he did the night at the dinner party. Will opens the door and leaves, without saying another word. Hannibal shuts it behind him and walks over to his desk. He takes a seat and pushes a pencil back and forth with his fingers. After a couple minutes of sitting in thought, Hannibal leaves for the night.

Early in the morning, Will receives a call shortly after arriving at work. He picks up. It’s Jack.

“Hello?” Will says.

“Ripper started a new cycle,” Jack sounds in emotional pain, “His break got shorter. I hoped that we’d get a couple of months before he came back.”

“You picking me up or am I meeting you there?”

“I’ll come get you.”

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

A dream conjured into the physical world. A nightmare sought to haunt outside of the mind. A sight that should've stayed behind the back of one's eyes. However, it's there. It presents itself in front of the one whose imagination led to it being crafted.

One tear crawls out of Will's eye, escaping down his cheek. A slip of his strength. A crack in his fort. In front of him is a body in the middle of a park, laid on an autopsy slab. The victim's abdomen has been sliced open. His hands were cut off and were nailed into the sides of his head as if someone else were holding his head still. The body's eyes are open and dried on one cheek is a tear of blood. It's worse than what Will imagined. It has been elevated to a level far darker than his own.

"First, the body was cut open. Followed up by the severing of the hands. He worked quick. The cause of death wasn't blood loss, but rather the nails being driven into the skull," Zeller states.

Will rubs his face, destroying evidence of a tear. He looks at the body. He debates if he's imagining it or not, but Beverly's hand on his arm tells him he's not.

She gives him a worried look, "Are you alright?"

"Feels like I'm in a nightmare."

"So do I," Beverly sighs.

"He removed his heart," Price interrupts.

"Does anyone have an aspirin?" Will feels like his mind is about to implode.

Price pulls out a bottle out of a bag and tosses it to him. Will takes four tablets without water, which is over the dosage listed, but no one says anything. It's not too far over to cause concern and they can all see how drained Will looks. Will hands the bottle back.

Jack watches Will, somewhat hesitant to ask his input, "What do you see, Will?"

Will looks at the body, "I don't know."

"What message is he trying to tell us?"

He shakes his head and looks at his feet, "I don't know."

"I need something, Will."

“What do you want from me?” Will raises his voice, “It’s another body, Jack! It’s just another body. The message doesn’t matter if there’s no evidence!”

Will walks past everyone, leaving the crime scene boundaries. When he’s walking off, he’s approached by a red-headed woman.

“Excuse me, sir. Can you tell me why you were yelling just then?” She gets in his face.

Will is silent.

“You’re the teacher that’s been assisting on cases, correct? With breakdowns like that, how are you able to work with the BAU? You failed your screening process and you have an ability to think like a killer. Shouldn’t they be worried?”

He stops walking and looks at her with a blank expression, “Shouldn’t you be worried?”

The question sits in the air for a moment before he excuses himself. Will walks past the woman and gets a taxi home, deciding to take the day off. More like skipping the rest of the day, but same difference. When he gets home, he curls up on his mattress and zones out for hours.

He thinks about how he told Hannibal the details of several nightmares the night before. Now, there’s a body that is a replica of what he described. That’s no coincidence, but it’s still only circumstantial. He can’t explain how much he’s grown to despise that word.

Hannibal killed that man. There’s no doubt about it. Will just can’t prove it. How is one supposed to prove that he had a dream about something and told someone then that someone killed a person in the same way? You can’t. Not without some sort of solid evidence will he be able to ever nail down Hannibal as the Chesapeake Ripper. For his sake, he needs physical evidence.

His phone rings. It’s Beverly.

“Yeah?” Will says.

“I just wanted to give you a heads up… Freddie Lounds posted an article about you. It’s not good.”

Will gets up and opens up a laptop to look up the article.

“Remember as you’re reading, she’s a tabloid journalist with a habit of pulling stuff out her ass to get reads.”

Will clicks on the article and slowly scrolls through, reading it.

<u>It Takes One To Know One</u>

The FBI isn’t just hunting psychopaths, they’re head-hunting them too, offering competitive pay and benefits in the hopes of using one demented mind to catch another.

Will Graham, a teacher at the FBI Academy, has been assisting on cases in the Virginia-Maryland area recently. You might ask, why hasn't he been officially hired as a part of the Behavioral Analysis Unit? It's due to his failing the screening procedure, which detects instability.

Today at the scene of the Chesapeake Ripper's recent killing, Graham was spotted yelling at the head of the BAU, Agent Jack Crawford, in front of the victim's body. Here's what he said:

"It's another body, Jack. It's just another body. The message doesn't matter if there's no evidence."

Doesn't seem like Graham has much empathy, despite his empathy disorder, or much faith in the FBI.

After his public breakdown, I confronted him with questions about the scene and the words he shared to Crawford. I asked if the FBI should be worried about his breakdowns considering his job is to think like a killer. He replied,

"Shouldn't you be worried?"

He then stared at me like a ravenous predator and walked away. I wonder what Jack Crawford is thinking about Graham's recent behavior since he is the one who brought Will Graham onto these cases. Did he know of Graham's tendencies and hope to use one psychopath to catch another?

He takes off his glasses and shuts the laptop. Beverly hears him sigh on the other side of the phone.

"I'm sorry, Will."

"It's fine. The worst thing is while she's focusing on me, the Ripper is moving onto his next victim."

"I wish she could just report facts."

"Then she wouldn't get reads."

"Do you think the Ripper reads TattleCrime?" Beverly asks.

"Yes, it probably strokes his ego," Will thinks about Hannibal reading this article, "Now I'm imagining the Ripper getting secondhand embarrassment for me."

Beverly laughs, "That's kind of funny. Imagine him sitting there on an iPad scrolling through TattleCrime, reading about how you yelled at Jack."

Will lets out a soft chuckle, "That is funny."

“He might be playing Candy Crush as we speak.”

“If he heard you say that, he’d eat you.”

“He’d eat me?”

Will realizes what he said, “It’s just a theory of where the organs are going. Nothing I’ve decided on.”

“Oh, I guess that could make sense, but then what does he do when he’s not publicly killing?”

“Haven’t thought about it. I assume he is still killing people, but not displaying them. Either he hides them or hides his taking of organs. Maybe he doesn’t kill. Could just have the diet of a normal person when he’s not killing.”

“The first one sounds more likely. Doubt he’d want to step away from his cravings.”

“Yeah,” Will thinks about Hannibal’s pantry, “I’m going to go. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“Okay, get some rest, Will.”

“I’ll try.”

The two hang up and Will sits there. He knows Hannibal won’t kill tonight, but perhaps after their dinner tomorrow, he might. He wonders why Hannibal decided to kill again so quickly. It was so blatant what his inspiration was. Hannibal must’ve wanted him to know. Why, though? He’s been adamant about how Will has been accusing him with no evidence to back him up. Is he wanting to be caught? If that’s what he wants, Will shall give it to him.

The next day, Will feels as if everyone's eyes are on him, which they are. He goes down to Jack’s office and knocks on the door.

“Come in,” Jack says, looking at a pinboard of Chesapeake Ripper victims.

Will enters and shuts the door behind him. He clears his throat, “I just wanted to apologize.”

“No need. Freddie Lounds and her article are enough. We don’t need any frustration on my part.”

Will nods.

“If you need to step away, Will, I understand.”

“I don’t want to step away. The scene yesterday just… it was different. I can't explain it but it was different.”

“Well, if you figure out a way to explain it, let me know.”

“Will do.”

He leaves Jack's office and heads down to the lab to check on things. Like always, there was no forensic evidence left on the body. He decides to go back to class, not wanting to think about it at the moment. Once classes are done for the day, he goes home and showers. He dresses semi-nicely for dinner at Hannibal's.

Hannibal never told Will a time, but he assumes it's at 6:30. He assumed right. Will gets there about five minutes until 6:30 and knocks at the front door. Hannibal answers with a grin and lets him in. Will walks inside and makes his way to the dining room. Already on the table are glasses and a bottle of wine.

"I'll only be a moment," Hannibal goes into the kitchen.

Will takes his seat and waits. Hannibal comes back with two plates and sets one down in front of Will. He then pours the wine into the two glasses. Will looks down at the plate. It's indeed fish.

Hannibal sits down, "I thought that grilling the fish whole would encourage you to eat, knowing that I truly serve what I say I serve."

"How thoughtful."

"I'd hope so," He sips his wine, "How was your day, Will?"

Will groans, "Painfully long."

"Working seems to have that trend."

"At least it switches up sometimes."

"Yes, though, I imagine you enjoy repetition and structure. When you worked on boat motors, didn't you enjoy knowing what the problem was and having a straightforward way to solve it?"

"I did. It was nice for a while."

"But then the hunt called you back."

"Yep," Will eats the fish, "Not as good as southern cooking, but good."

"Apologies for not meeting your standards, dear William."

"You enjoy a challenge, so try again next time."

Hannibal nods and eats.

"Do you play Candy Crush?" Will asks.

"Excuse me?"

"Nothing, nothing. It was something I was talking to Beverly about."

“You two were discussing if I play mobile games?”

Will shrugs, “Something like that.”

“Might I ask you about the Freddie Lounds’ article?”

“So you read TattleCrime,” Will mumbles.

“I do, yes.”

“Guessed, and yes. Ask away.”

“How are you?”

“Great. Just great. She insinuated that I’m a psychopath. Revealed to the world I failed the screening process to be a special agent. Said I had no faith in the FBI. Told everyone that I thought the victim was just another body. I’m great,” Will drinks a big gulp of wine, “I’d be better with a stiff drink.”

“Do you want something else?”

“No, thank you. I’m just a bit ticked off by the article if you couldn’t tell.”

“Wouldn’t have guessed.”

Will leans back in his seat, “She painted herself in a much better light.”

“She must in order to make you appear as the villain.”

“The darkest part of all she didn’t even mention.”

“The Chesapeake Ripper. Would you like to discuss the scene since it was the cause of your outburst.”

“No, I wouldn’t,” Will looks into Hannibal’s eyes with a blank face. He doesn’t want to give Hannibal the satisfaction of talking about his crime.

“Very well. We won’t,” Hannibal sips his wine.

They finish their meals and walk to the kitchen together. Will insists on helping Hannibal wash the dishes. The two stand side by side at the sink and gently scrub the plates and silverware clean. Their shoulders brush slightly as they do so. While it seems like a small thing, Hannibal could easily take a step over and allow them some space.

Will dries the plates with a towel and sets them to the side, along with the glasses and silverware. He looks up at Hannibal who is watching him. Will leans against the counter, putting his hands on the counter bent at the elbow. Hannibal steps in front of him.

“I often imagine how life would be if I remained in Florence, or if I moved back. Do you?” Hannibal asks.

“I think about if I never left. I imagine I’d be a fisherman.”

“Non polizia?” He asks in an Italian accent.

“No, just a fisherman.”

“I imagine that would suit you well.”

“Would you return to Florence if need be?”

“If need be, yes. Though, I would miss you, Will. It’s ludicrous to think in such a way, but I hope if I had to, you would return to Florence alongside me.”

Will doesn’t know how to reply to Hannibal’s affectionate statement.

Hannibal looks down at Will and his hand moves up to Will’s face. Softly, he rubs his thumb against Will’s cheek. Hannibal looks as if he wishes to speak but is unable to. While Will is confident he knows what Hannibal is, he wishes for Hannibal to come closer. He tells himself it’s because he’s clinging for anyone or anything, but his gut slaps him for thinking it’s so simple. He hates himself for it.

Hannibal whispers, “Tell me what you want me to do.”

For a second, Will says nothing. Then he tells Hannibal, “Kiss me.”

Immediately after those words leave Will’s mouth, Hannibal kisses him. His other hand touches Will’s face, while Will’s hands rise to hold Hannibal’s waist. Hannibal’s eyes shut and so Will does the same. However, he can’t help but open his eyes at one point and glance at the pantry, second guessing everything he is doing. He shuts off his mind and allows himself to sink into the moment, filling his mind with the passion radiating from Hannibal.

Hannibal takes hold of Will’s hair in his fist and tilts his head back forcefully. Gently, he kisses down along Will’s carotid artery. A breath of air escapes Will’s mouth in reaction to the sensation. He lets go of Will’s hair and moves his hand to his throat. He doesn’t squeeze but simply rests his hand on Will’s neck. Will won’t deny that he enjoys the control Hannibal has at the moment. Everything is up to Hannibal and Will is relieved.

Where his desire could fill a room, Hannibal remains slow with every step in their dance. He pauses their kissing and looks into Will’s eyes. For a minute, Hannibal holds Will close to his chest. His hand cradles Will’s head. Again, whispering, Hannibal says, “ *Mylimasis, būk su manimi.* ”

(Beloved, stay/be with me.)

Will has zero clue what just came out of his mouth but he appreciates how raw the language sounds. He rests his head on Hannibal’s shoulder. They just remain like that for a while. No hurry to go anywhere.

After they’ve stayed in an embrace for an unspoken reasonable amount of time, they let go. Hannibal is not awkward during the post-holding, but Will is. He’s not sure what to do at that

point. Hannibal takes hold of his hands and speaks to take Will away from the shyness he is feeling, “I enjoyed dinner, Will. Now you should head home, unless you want to stay the night of course.”

“Trying to get me into bed?” Will jokes.

“I’m open to that possibility, but I meant the guest room.”

Will looks down and thinks.

“I wouldn’t like to drive all the way back home right now.”

A small smile appears on Hannibal’s face, “You may have the guest room unless you want to accompany me.”

“The guest room.”

“Very well,” Hannibal takes him upstairs to the guest room.

Will thanks him and tells him, “Goodnight.”

“Goodnight, William,” He puts his hands in his pockets, “Might I expect another pantry break-in?”

Will shakes his head, “Not tonight.”

“Alright, sleep well.”

Hannibal walks away from Will’s door and goes into his room. Will shuts the door and kicks his shoes off. Everything else he’s wearing, he sleeps in. It must be the expensive mattress because both times he’s slept in that bed, he’s slept amazingly.

The next morning, he is met in the kitchen with breakfast. Hannibal has made french toast with fresh fruit. Will comes in and stretches. Hannibal, while not in his full suit and hair in his face, is still dressed nicely. He is wearing suit pants and a white button-up. Plus, an apron.

“Love the apron,” Will comments.

Hannibal pours Will a cup of coffee and sets it down in front of him.

“Thank you for the food,” Will eats a strawberry.

Hannibal drinks coffee and leans against the counter.

“Got any weekend plans?” Will asks.

He nods, “Attending the opera this evening. I’d invite you, but that doesn’t seem like an event you’d find enjoyable. The atmosphere will be similar to that of my dinner party.”

“You’re right. Doesn’t sound like my type of thing.”

Will cuts into the French toast and eats. In a couple of minutes, he receives a phone call from Jack. When he sees who's calling, he stares at his phone screen for a second. Hannibal watches him as the ringing continues.

He answers the phone, "It's Saturday, Jack."

"I'm aware. The Ripper dropped a new one. How quickly can you get to the scene?"

Will looks up at Hannibal, "Is it in Baltimore?"

"Yeah, like usual."

"I can be there soon."

"Okay, I'll send you the address."

"Ok," Will hangs up.

He sets the phone on the counter and sits in silent stillness. Hannibal sips his coffee. Will stands up and rubs his beard, not knowing what to say.

"Ripper strike again?" Hannibal asks.

Will looks at him like he's lost his mind. He doesn't understand what game Hannibal is trying to play.

"Yeah."

"Are you going to finish your breakfast?"

"What do you think?" Will grabs his phone.

Hannibal tilts his head at Will, "Watch out for the redhead."

Will has an urge to tell Hannibal to go fuck himself, but he holds it in. He walks out of the kitchen and then the house. He hurries to his car, wanting to leave the property as quickly as possible, and drives off to the crime scene.

Chapter End Notes

Hannibal is a ballsy little bitch, but in an adoring way. <3

Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

The Mizumono of this fic. Hopefully I do the original some justice with my version.

The scene is painfully familiar. It completely lacks any desire to cover its inspiration. Will's fists clench, then unclench. This process repeats several times as he stares at the scene. Found in a butcher shop's walk-in freezer was a body hanging from a hook. The chest has been opened, showing a heart, but the man holds another heart in his hand. Around his mouth is blood and there's a chunk missing from the heart in his hand.

Will takes a closer look at the heart in the man's chest. It has been exposed to further decomposition compared to the rest of the body. There's no way it belongs to the dead man in front of him.

Beverly comes up beside him, "If you're thinking what I thought, you're right. That doesn't belong to the victim. My guess, it belongs to the guy from the other day. The heart in his hand, the one he took a bite out of, is his. Matches the decomp."

"Did he take any organs from the victim?" Will asks.

"Nope, not this time."

"What was the cause of death?"

"The chest being cut open then the heart being removed."

Will puts on some gloves and slowly opens the victim's mouth.

"Be careful. He could break," Price warns.

He opens the mouth and sees evidence such as blood and bits of tissue left in the teeth and on the tongue. Once he sees what he wants, he lets go of the victim's mouth. He takes off the gloves and disposes of them.

"He was made to eat and swallow the part of the heart he took a bite of. It wasn't post-mortem."

"With the temperature, the blood flow would've been slow enough for that to be done before he kicked the bucket. Though, I doubt it went far. Probably still in his throat," Zeller comments.

Will looks at the heart and sees how there's only one bite taken out of it. Hannibal didn't create his work with complete accuracy. Immediately after Will thinks this, Hannibal's voice echoes through his mind.

Because it wasn't your heart, William. I want your heart.

Will rubs his hands together for warmth and steps out of the freezer. Jack is there waiting for his assessment. Will sniffles and sighs, "He wants to eat someone's heart. That's all I got."

"Is that figuratively or literally?" Jack asks.

"Bit of both."

"Whose heart?"

"Mine."

"Yours?"

"Feels like it."

"Will, what are you saying? Are you saying the Ripper is targeting you?"

"I'm saying it feels like it."

"What's telling you that?"

"My gut. It's nothing to take seriously, Jack. He's not coming after me."

Jack squints his eyes, "You can't drop something like that and tell me not to take it seriously. He has no qualms over killing FBI."

"It's all good. Trust me."

"Damn you, Will. One of these days, you're going to give me a stroke. You know that right?"

"Well, then thank god the Bureau has benefits."

Jack slaps Will upside the head, "Go home."

Will nods and goes to his car. He follows what Jack told him and drives home. His frustration with Hannibal and the Ripper killings is growing, seemingly hitting a new high. He decides that he needs to find hard evidence. No more circumstantial shit.

He opens up his laptop and searches for an opera event tonight in Baltimore. Like the words of the deceased Tobias Budge, the cultural arts community is small. To Will's luck, there is only one opera occurring that night. It takes place from 7:30 to 9:30. If Will wants to search for evidence, he needs to do it from 8 until 9. Gives him enough time in case Hannibal is late or leaves early.

The afternoon is spent documenting all circumstantial and coincidental evidence he has. Around 6:50, he departs from his home to get to Hannibal's house. He arrives on schedule and when he's there, he sees that Hannibal's car is gone. He parks his car a few houses down and goes up to Hannibal's front door. Wondering if the door is simply unlocked like the night after kissing Alana, he tries to open the door. It's locked. He assumes that Hannibal's thought process is that if everyone uninvited comes in while he's there, that's a problem he can deal with.

Will goes around to the backyard where the glass doors are. Easily, he picks the lock. It's a trick he picked up in Italy. He steps inside into the dining room and locks the door behind him. Will walks to the kitchen, heading to the pantry. He grabs a knife and pries the door open. His attention is immediately directed toward the refrigerator.

Inside, there's less meat than last time. Simply what appears to be a steak. Will takes a picture of it and grabs the meat. He sets it on the kitchen counter and goes back into the pantry. There's something he's missing. Something dark. Something deadly.

He looks around the pantry. There's no doors along the walls. As he walks across the pantry floor, in the quiet, he hears an echo. Will looks down at the wooden floor. In the center of the floor, the tiles have more of a gap. He squats down and uses his fingers to try to lift the floorboards. They open up with a creak to reveal a flight of stairs leading to a basement.

Will whispers, "There you are."

After taking two steps down, the powerful odor of cleaning products and chilly air blasts him in the face. His eyes close in reaction, almost stinging. He climbs down the staircase, entering the dark basement. To his left and right, there are two huge tanks. They're almost as tall as him.

Will pulls a flashlight out of his pocket and turns it on. Slowly, he walks through the basement. It feels never ending. How it was made, Will has no idea. Along the walkway, there's plastic sheets hanging from the ceiling and chains. He walks around the plastic and sees lots of equipment. Some medical. Some hardware. There's also a cabinet full of different drugs. A few of them appear to be sedatives. He steps past the cabinet and sees a light switch and flicks it on.

One by one, rows of lights come on, revealing a monstrous sight. An original piece, though inspired by Will's nightmares. Hanging on a cross is a man with antlers sprouting from his skull. Blood has dropped from the area, down his face. It creates a red veil over the man's face. Blending in with the sight are two eyes that have been inked solid black. The man's torso has been cut open and all, except his heart, is gone.

Will falls to his knees in front of the display of forbidden beauty. It's monumental but horrific. The one who made it is far from a place of sound mind. Though, the artistry almost begs to differ. Tears roll down Will's face like trickling rain. He's not sad but the body in front of him moves him to tears, invoking an emotional response that he's not capable of truly understanding.

“I was hopeful that you’d appreciate it,” a familiar voice, yet darker than usual, speaks behind him, “I wanted it to be a more personal showing. Not something for the public eye, but for you alone.”

Will is frozen in place. His throat suddenly has run dry and the tears have been halted. Quietly he replies, “Thought you were going to the opera.”

“Change of plan,” Hannibal takes a breath, “For so long, I’ve desperately wanted you to know, William. You’ve deserved to know since you first found me in front of the Primavera. It’s pained me to hide that part of myself from you.”

“You didn’t have to hide. You could’ve confessed. Saved the pain.”

“That wouldn’t have satisfied either of us, and you know that. How does it feel, Will, to be right? Confidently right. No more coincidences. No more collisions with the circumstantial.”

“Doesn’t feel that good,” Will stands, scared to turn around.

“I wanted you to discover me for yourself. I’ve wanted that for you since you surprised me in my office. The chase caused you frustration, anger, grief, and for that I am wholeheartedly apologetic.”

“So you wanted me to come down here and find this?”

“You have given me many pleasant surprises. It was only right if I returned the sentiment.”

Will turns around to look at Hannibal. Like this morning, he is dressed down in the same white button up, sleeves now rolled up, and black dress pants. Hannibal’s eyes show more emotion than Will has yet seen. Behind them is eagerness, yet an anxious fear for what is to come. Seeing that Hannibal is fearing what happens next increases the dread in Will’s heart, amplifying his own anxiety.

“Hannibal, I don’t know what you want me to do.”

“Yes, you do, Will. You have known for some time,” Hannibal steps closer to him.

Will looks up at Hannibal and shakes his head, “You want me to see you, accept you… Accept what comes with you.”

Hannibal doesn’t speak, but just allows himself to sink into Will’s eyes. His eyes are pleading to Will. Pleading for Will to accept him.

“I can’t,” Will swallows, “I’ve wanted for so long to catch you. I can’t betray myself.”

Something in Hannibal’s eyes change and his pleading stops. The fear leaves and is replaced with something much worse. Much more terrifying. It’s been replaced with the sight of someone whose mind has been made. Those dark eyes now reflect pain.

Hannibal holds out his hand for Will. Knowing he doesn’t have much choice in what happens next, Will takes Hannibal’s hand. Hannibal pulls him in close and strokes the back of Will’s

hair with gentle care. He whispers, “Will you forgive me, Will?”

The puncture of a blade is felt within Will’s gut. The slicing of his flesh is audible to both of their ears. Almost directly after the impact, blood begins to seep out of Will’s abdomen, leaking onto the ground. Hannibal holds him still by his hair. Will groans as the blade is dragged further through him, widening the cut. He gasps for air and grips onto Hannibal’s shoulder with one hand to try to keep himself upright. His other hand is reaching for his gut. Small whimpers mixed with grunts release from his throat as his body feels the pain spread throughout his body.

Hannibal drops the knife and brings Will into an embrace. Will’s head rests upon Hannibal’s shoulder, almost buried into Hannibal’s neck. His breaths are quick and weak. As he holds Will, he shushes him, like one would do to a crying baby.

“I let you know me, see me. I gave you a rare gift, but you didn’t want it,” Hannibal mumbles, his voice sounds like it could break at any moment.

He lets go of Will and Will collapses to the ground.

“You’d rather confine me to a prison cell. Take away my freedom.”

Will curls up, holding his stomach in an attempt to keep the blood inside. Soon, a pool of blood forms around him. Hannibal looks down at the pitiful sight. His heart feels strained. Regret begins to crawl in.

He runs his bloodied hand through his hair and crouches down beside Will. He digs through Will’s pockets for his phone and uses it to call Jack. The phone rings a few times and Jack picks up. Hannibal holds it to Will’s ear, allowing him to speak. Will looks up at him with confusion.

“Hello? Will?” Jack says on the other end.

“Ja– Jack. Hannibal Lecter. Ripper. ERT. His house,” Will spits out.

“Will? Are you alright?”

Will can’t muster up a response.

“I’m sending ERT now. I’ll be there soon. Hold in there.”

Hannibal hangs up the phone. He hurries over to his cabinet and grabs a towel. He sits down beside Will and pulls him into his lap. He presses the towel against his gut. While he doesn’t want Will to die, his anger toward Will won’t allow him to save him, but assist only.

“The temperature will help slow your blood flow. Just stay still, Will,” Hannibal holds him.

Will tries to look at Hannibal. He gets a quick glance of Hannibal and sees that his eyes hold tears, as does Will’s. He softly asks, “Why?”

“Why am I here helping you?”

Hannibal considers it for a moment, trying to understand it himself.

“The human mind’s complication is something many have studied, but do not yet understand. My mind will be added to the list of those who people attempt to dissect. Though, only one understands me, and that one person is you.”

The two sit together in silence. This silence is soon interrupted by the front door being kicked open and many men pouring into the home.

“Will!” A deep voice shouts through the home.

Pounding footsteps enter the kitchen and see the light coming from the pantry. It doesn’t take them long to begin coming down into the basement.

Hannibal whispers in Will’s ear, “I want you to know exactly where I am, and where you can always find me. Recover well, *Mylimasis* .”

He kisses Will’s head.

FBI SWAT begins shouting at Hannibal to put his hands up. Jack among them.

Hannibal carefully sets Will out of his lap, making sure his head is put against the ground in a gentle way. He slowly raises to his feet, hands behind his head. SWAT grabs him and shoves him onto the ground, putting him in handcuffs. Jack runs over to Will and yells for ERT. Two men come over with a stretcher and put Will on it. As Will is carried away, he looks at Hannibal who's being practically smothered by SWAT but is still managing to look at Will. Jack walks over to Hannibal and grabs him by his hair and lays a good punch to his face. The punch busts Hannibal’s lip due to Jack’s wedding ring. He spits blood onto the ground.

Jack growls, “I’m going to make your life hell.”

Hannibal does not speak or resist. SWAT pulls him up to his feet and Jack motions for them to take him. They do as he wants and drag Hannibal up the stairs. Jack looks at the body Hannibal gifted to Will. He feels sick. He pulls out his phone and calls the forensics team to come to sweep Hannibal’s house.

Jack meets Will in the ambulance.

Will turns to him and mumbles, “Meat, counter. Test it. Human meat. My car, there's a notepad. Stay. Check it.”

“I can’t leave you, Will,” Jack argues.

“Stay. Go through it all.”

Jack nods, “Okay. I’ll see you after surgery.”

Will nods.

Jack checks Will's pocket for his keys. Once he has them, he hops out of the ambulance and watches as it drives away in a haste. He goes to Will's car and sitting in the passenger side is a notepad. It lists all of the circumstantial evidence he has for Hannibal, excluding Il Mostro. Jack takes the notepad and locks the car behind him. Soon, Beverly, Price, and Zeller show up and they dissect Hannibal's home, collecting tons of strong evidence from his pantry and basement.

He will be convicted and imprisoned for his crimes. Without the circumstantial evidence Will collected, Hannibal might have avoided all the Chesapeake Ripper charges, but with Will's evidence comes enough to have reason to believe he murdered all of those people.

While his recovery is painful and slow, Will is expected to fully recover, minus a scar that stretches across his gut. Hannibal manages to slip by the death sentence due to an insanity plea and the head of BSCHI, Chilton, wanting the Chesapeake Ripper under his care. This angers Jack but there's nothing he can do to change it. As for Will, he does not want to hear anything about Hannibal or the Chesapeake Ripper case.

Unfortunately for him, Freddie Lounds plasters all over her website about Hannibal Lecter, the Chesapeake Ripper, and Will Graham. She paid an officer for crime scene photos and the scoop on Will Graham's connection to the Ripper is. Despite having been the reason the Ripper was caught with no way to get past the evidence, she paints Will in a negative light. She goes as far as to call them lovers who had a nasty breakup, though there's no evidence for them having any romantic connection. That only lies within Will and Hannibal's memories.

Hannibal is locked away far into the possession of the BSCHI. His cell is below ground, at the end of a dark hallway. The hallway walls are dirty brick and inside the cell, concrete blocks. His bed is thin and as hard as the cement he's surrounded by. Chilton is kind enough to allow Hannibal access to books and paper to draw on, but this is truly only bribery in hopes that Hannibal will give him access to his mind. Hannibal likes to tease and lead him on, but he does not plan on allowing anyone to do that. For his mind is reserved for one person— Will Graham.

Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

> Clarice Starling makes her entrance. Don't worry, Hannibal and Will is still the main point of the story.

Three years have passed since Hannibal Lecter was imprisoned. Over and over, he's dealt with people interviewing and analyzing him. At first, he maintained some decency and was kind and had manners. Though, as time goes on, he needs entertainment. Now, the mask is completely off and he is often full of sass. He behaves how he did in Florence, all those years ago. Living in deep solitude without any intelligent conversations has filled him with longing.

On a bad day, Hannibal thinks of Will constantly. At least once an hour. On a good day, he's able to keep Will from crossing his thoughts to once or twice that day. His walls are lined with his favorite drawings over the three years. Most are architectural designs. Some that he's seen throughout his life that he found beautiful. Other drawings are portraits or recreations of paintings. In a few of them, he replaces a person with Will's face. A small reminder of the man he once knew. The man he once shared dinner with. The man he once kissed. The man he once cut open. The man he went to prison because of.

He's occasionally sent Will letters, but he's never written back. Hannibal isn't entirely sure they're being sent. Though, he believes Will is simply not returning Hannibal's desire to talk. He knows Will quit the FBI not too long after as he was recovered. Hannibal takes the blame for that result. He's often reminded of things that are his fault by Jack Crawford.

During the three years, Jack's wife died so he turned even further toward his work. In this conquest, Jack began to send FBI agents to Hannibal in order to understand, in hopes to catch the next Ripper. Most of them leave empty handed. Those who don't, leave with a newly scheduled therapy appointment or a job resignation.

Chilton delivers a printed out article to Hannibal, "You're losing popularity, Hannibal. There's a new one. Buffalo Bill."

Hannibal looks over the paper, "Upset that your prized pony is being forgotten as they're locked in the dungeon?"

"Ha! Prized pony? You are one prideful specimen, I'll give you that. Any insights you might have on Billy Boy?"

"Frederick, your efforts always entertain me."

“Why do you do this to me?”

“Because I so love your reactions.”

Chilton sighs, “You have a visitor on their way.”

“Very well.”

He walks away from Hannibal’s cell, exiting through the barred door at the end of the hallway. Hannibal scans over the article taking in the details such as the method he killed and hid the bodies. Freddie Lounds was kind enough to include any pictures she got as well. He’s debated for some time doing an interview with Freddie as a source of amusement. Perhaps he should, regarding Buffalo Bill. He decides to see what his guest has in store first.

In about an hour, the metal barred door slides open. Hannibal rises to his feet and stands in the middle of his cell, hands at his side. As footsteps draw further down the hall, the voices of other inmates begin to speak. One whispers something horrible to the guest.

When the guest appears in front of his cell, Hannibal is almost thrown back three years ago when Will Graham surprised him at his office. The person in front of him is a young, brunette woman with eager, innocent eyes.

“Morning,” Hannibal greets.

“Dr. Lecter, my name is Clarice Starling. May I speak with you?” She asks.

Straight to the point, like Will. A Southern accent as well. Too many similarities for it not to be a mind game delivered to his cell by Jack.

“You’re one of Jack Crawford’s, aren’t you?”

“I am, yes sir.”

“May I see your credentials?”

“Certainly,” She pulls out a badge to show Hannibal.

“Closer, please,” Hannibal begins his game of cat and mouse.

Clarice takes a step forward and is met with another demand for her to come closer. When she is where he wants her, Hannibal steps even closer to the glass separating them. Only three feet away now, Hannibal looks down at the badge. It expires in a week.

“You’re not real FBI, are you?”

“I’m still in training at the Academy.”

Almost offended, but also enthralled, Hannibal replies, “Jack Crawford sent a trainee to me?”

“Yes, sir, I’m a student. I’m here to learn from you. Maybe you can decide for yourself whether or not I’m qualified enough to do that.”

Hannibal lets out a soft hum, never breaking eye contact with her. Unlike Will, Clarice is much more comfortable with maintaining a stare. He can’t help but be amused by her ignorance to manipulation. She is opening her mind to him without realizing it. He decides to give her some criticism but with a smile, “That is quite slippery of you, Miss Starling.”

He then tells her to sit, which she does.

Hannibal decides to push boundaries on how uncomfortable Clarice will get before tapping out, “Tell me, what did Miggs whisper to you? The man in the next cell. He hissed at you. What did he say?”

“He said, ‘I can smell your cunt.’”

“I see. I myself cannot, and I have quite a keen nose.”

She gives an awkward smile. Her eyes glance over at the drawings he has hung around his cell, “Did you do these drawings, Doctor?”

He turns his head toward the sketches, “Ah, yes. Different buildings from Florence. That there is the Belvedere.”

“All that detail just from memory, sir?”

Hannibal smiles, “Memory is what I have instead of view. Frederick hasn’t been too pleased with my cooperation, so he has stuck me inside an underground box.”

She laughs, “Perhaps you’d care to lend us your view on this questionnaire, sir?”

He shakes his head and sighs, “You were doing quite well, Miss Starling. You have no need for a script.”

“I’m only asking you to look at this, Doctor. Either you will or you won’t.”

“Tell me. Is Jack Crawford that busy to where he’s resorted to recruiting help from the student body? Must be, considering the last trainee he sent to me, I killed. Is he busy hunting that new one, Buffalo Bill?”

She is silent.

“Indulge me, Agent Starling. Why do you think he removes their skins?”

He is curious if she will think on a surface level, as do all the others. Or, if she will dive in further, as Will would.

“It excites him. Most serial killers keep some sort of trophy from their victims.”

“I didn’t.”

“No, no. You ate yours.”

A sense of excitement sparks in his brain as she says that last sentence. In the back of his mind, he can hear Will still dropping bratty comments in hopes to get Hannibal to slip up. He does miss Will’s attitude. It’s the only rudeness he could stand.

Pleased with her comment, he tells her to send the questionnaire through. She stands and puts it in the box for him to grab on the other side. He removes it and begins flipping through the pages. She watches with those eager eyes. He glances over at her and winks, then draws his attention to the pages once more.

Disappointment fills his eyes as he looks at the new trash Jack is throwing his way. He walks back over to the box, “Jack must step up on his part. Perhaps I need to write him a new form. This one hasn’t seemed to be updated in the last decade. If he was truly invested in his field, he’d do his research.”

Hannibal slides the file through, back to Clarice.

“You fly back to school now, Agent Starling,” Hannibal turns around to face the back of his cell.

She slowly stands and picks up her briefcase, almost sad by her being sent off.

Hannibal, due to her resemblance to Will, has an interest in her succeeding. Before she walks away, he speaks again, “Look deep within yourself, Clarice Starling. Seek out an old patient of mine, Miss Mofet.”

“Alright. Thank you, Dr. Lecter.”

“Would you inform Jack Crawford that I wish to speak to him?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Thank you, Clarice.”

She walks down the hallway. Hannibal knows she’s gone when he hears that awful barred door shut. The metal scraping is painful to his ears. Later that afternoon, Jack visits Hannibal. He stands in front of Hannibal’s cell, “Talk.”

Hannibal speaks, facing the back wall, “I do enjoy games, Jack, as do you. Though, never would I imagine you use a trainee to play. Do I torment you that severely?”

“You do not torment me, and you are unable to hurt her from within these bars. She is not another Miriam.”

Hannibal smirks, aware he can do much harm from inside his cell, “Is that a challenge?”

Jack is not amused.

“You’re right. She’s not another Miriam, but she bears resemblance to Will Graham, doesn’t she? I wonder if that’s why you sent poor Clarice into the lion’s den.”

Jack is silent. This silence is partially from his being called out. The other part is due to Hannibal’s deluded threats.

“Jack, answer me this. Do my letters leave this hospital?”

“Yes, he receives them.”

“I thought as much,” Hannibal turns his head slightly but not his body, “Are you aware of his current condition?”

“Last I checked, not that he wants to hear from me either, he is doing well and fixing boat motors somewhere along the water.”

“Did he leave Wolf Trap?”

“Yes, living up North in Maine.”

“He has no qualms about picking up and leaving, does he?”

“I wish he did. I could use him on the Buffalo Bill case.”

Hannibal turns around, “I believe Miss Starling can solve it just fine.”

Jack raises an eyebrow, “What game are you getting at?”

“I want to assist her. I won’t be straightforward, no, but I will help get her footing.”

“What’s in it for you?”

“Entertainment.”

“You told her to seek a Miss Mofet, yes?”

Hannibal nods, “It will help her. I assure you.”

“Alright,” Jack just walks off, leaving Hannibal alone.

He sits down at his desk. There sitting is a drawing of a man looking at the Primavera. From all those years ago, the memory is crystal clear in his mind of Will approaching him at the Primavera and seeing the painting as Hannibal would. With expertise, he finishes the sketch by adding shading. Gently, he traces the outline of Will’s side profile with his finger. Oh, what he’d give to see him again.

For now, he’ll have to settle with Clarice Starling. Though, first it’s time for some fun. One that involves Miggs. Both to punish him for his behavior toward Clarice, but also as a way to prove to Jack that he’s capable of much more than he believes.

During the night, he coerces Miggs into swallowing his own tongue, killing him. This angers Frederick and makes Jack worry about Clarice.

The next night, Clarice returns after investigating Miss Mofet. Hannibal is sitting in the dark when she arrives. She found a head preserved in a jar. Hannibal says he did not kill them, but rather by a fledgling killer. He informs Clarice that the head belonged to a former victim of his who was killed. The patient was one whose life revolves around transition.

The lights of Hannibal's cell turn on, revealing empty walls and shelves. No longer is he surrounded by drawings and books. Just the concrete walls.

"What happened to your drawings?" She asks.

"Punishment for Miggs," Hannibal simply puts, "Frederick is a fan of petty torments."

"What did you mean by transformation, Doctor?"

"I've been locked in this cell for three years, Clarice. I want a view. Something with a window or skylight. Somewhere where I can see water or trees. Perhaps an old church in the distance."

"What did you mean by fledgling killer? Are you saying he's killed again?"

"I'm offering you a psychological profile on Buffalo Bill, based on the case evidence. I'll help you catch him. I only need the case file."

"You know who he is, don't you? Tell me who decapitated your patient, Doctor."

"Patience. All good things to those who wait."

She looks frustrated, similar to Will when he was dealing with not being able to catch Hannibal. Hannibal tilts his head at her, "You remind me of an old friend, Clarice. Stubborn. Young. Impatient. Intelligent. Just the right bit of sass."

"Will Graham?" She clarifies.

Hannibal nods, "Will Graham."

"Do friends usually cut each other open?"

"We had a special relationship."

"Appears so."

"I imagine the two of you would get along well."

She can sense a sort of sadness in the air, coming from Hannibal. She asks, "Have you talked to him since you were imprisoned?"

He shakes his head, “He does not wish to speak to me, young Starling, and I hold nothing against him for that.”

“Are you helping me because I remind you of him?”

“You and Will have a quality about you that makes me desire to see you both succeed. For Will, his success would be to catch me. I pushed him to catch me but he had to earn it by gathering solid evidence. He did, so he caught me.”

“That night, you had the chance to run. You didn’t. Why?”

Hannibal smiles, “A topic for another day, Miss Starling. Thank you for the conversation. I’ve been in need of someone like you.”

She nods and smiles back, “I’ll be going now, Doctor.”

Clarice walks away from Hannibal and leaves the hallway. That godforsaken door reminds him once more of the loneliness he faces. He lays down on his uncomfortable bed and does his best to sleep. Behind his eyes, he replays the memory of him kissing Will for the first time. Soon, it soothes him to sleep.

When Clarice goes home that night, she researches Hannibal. Compared to the photos taken at his capture, Hannibal is skinnier now. After years on the prison food and years without seeing the bright shine of daylight, it’s had an impact on him physically. Mentally as well, but he’s a little more grounded in that area. Seeing the difference makes Clarice feel sorry for Hannibal, but then she remembers why it’s happening to him. He’s a killer. She shouldn’t empathize with him. Look what happened to the last guy who did.

She moves onto looking up Will. According to TattleCrime, he solved cases after he recovered but then left after a few months. There’s no stated reason why. Clarice reads the TattleCrime article from when Hannibal was arrested. She looks at the crime scene photos and never before has she felt nauseous looking at a picture. It looks like something out of a nightmare. His last three killings all do. Hannibal nor Will has ever stated the motive and inspiration behind the last three. If asked about it, Hannibal always dodges the question or flat out declines to answer. As Freddie Lounds says, they were closer, so perhaps it’s a connection between them that neither wants to reveal to the world. Something for both of them to keep to themselves, and only themselves. Deciding she had enough of the images from the crime scene, Clarice goes to bed.

Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

> Heads up, dialogue between Hannibal and Clarice from Silence of the Lambs about the situation of Buffalo Bill's character. Read the end notes and I'll explain the heads up.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Swaying to the wind, an army of greenery. Towering trees as far as the eyes can see. The air is fresh and crisp. Nearby are ports and islands. Little bit farther are mountains. A land of solitude. A sanctuary. Will has found his new home, away from the drama of the FBI. Away from the Chesapeake Ripper. Away from Hannibal.

He lives in a cabin, alone, with several dogs. It's the way he wants it. Plus, it doesn't help that the last person he kissed gutted him. Therefore, he's resorted to living his ideal life. Somewhere in the woods, with a cabin, surrounded by dogs. It's what he wanted for Wolf Trap, but never got the opportunity.

Will works down at a port, fixing any boats that need to be fixed. Out walking the dogs, he stops by the post office to check if he's received any mail over the past week. Ads, bills, and a letter from the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminal Insane.

He leaves the post office and visits a market place to get groceries for the week. Afterwards, he walks the dogs back home and gives them a snack. Will sits down at his desk and sorts through his mail. He throws away most of the ads. He goes online and makes sure to pay his bills. Once the stack dwindles, he is left with the letter. The outside is a printed label for the addresses.

Using a letter opener, he opens the envelope. Inside is yet another envelope, but in lovely cursive is Will Graham's name rather than an address. He touches two fingers to the handwriting and quickly removes them as if he was burned. He opens a desk drawer and tosses the letter onto a stack of other letters that all have the same *Will Graham* written on them.

"17," He mumbles and closes the drawer.

Never once has he opened one. Though, it's not because he doesn't want to. He does want to, and that's why he can't open them. Every day those letters call to him, begging to be opened and read. By not reading them, Will is reminded that he is himself and has self control. He tells himself there's no need for Hannibal in his life beyond being something to reject. He enjoys his quiet, peaceful environment he has surrounded himself with. He does. However, no matter how much Will knows that, like Hannibal once said, the hunt calls for him. That's something Will cannot run from.

Even being surrounded with beautiful sights, inside he is longing for something more. Something more beautiful. He longs for the dark masterpieces that created a standard that the earth cannot surpass. He despises his desire for seeing those devastating displays again. All it would take to ease Will's mind is one look at TattleCrime. Just type in that name and scroll. Will shakes his head to himself and denies that route. Instead, he goes outside and tinkers on a boat project he's been doing in his spare time.

A few days pass and Buffalo Bill takes another woman. This time it's the daughter of a senator. Time is running out and the FBI has nothing to go on. They need to resort to Hannibal's help.

Jack and Clarice go to Chilton's office one morning to discuss Hannibal.

"We need his full cooperation, Dr. Chilton. As well as yours," Jack says.

"He says he wants a view. Anything from a window to a skylight would do. Is this possible to do, Doctor?" Clarice asks.

Chilton sits at his desk, looking at them. He's both frustrated that his turf is being invaded, but also very much pleased with the possible positive publicity he might receive by Hannibal assisting to catch Buffalo Bill.

"There is an old office space that's currently empty. It has a skylight and we have no use for the room at this time. We could renovate it to house Hannibal Lecter."

"That would be perfect," Jack replies.

"Mm, you do understand he killed a man from within his own cell, Agent Crawford, don't you?"

Jack nods, "I'm aware."

"Now you're here, doing his bidding."

"I'm here, trying to save a young woman."

"If you believe they are the same, so be it. I'll get people to begin working on the room pronto. Miss Starling, I imagine you are going to go speak to him now about all of this?"

"Yes, sir, if that's alright," Clarice seeks his approval to appease Chilton.

Chilton smiles and nods, motioning for her to go. Jack and Clarice both leave the office. He hands her the case file on Buffalo Bill. Clarice thanks him and goes down to Hannibal's cell. She walks down the hall and Hannibal is there waiting for her. He greets her with a smile like the other visits.

"Hello, Miss Starling."

"Hi, Doctor," She holds the file to her stomach, "There's been development on you assisting the FBI with the Buffalo Bill."

“Enlighten me.”

“Chilton has agreed to move you to another cell. An old office space with a skylight. Though, it all rides on you helping catch Buffalo Bill,” Clarice explains, sliding the case file through the box.

After putting the file through, she notices that he has been given back his books and drawings. Hannibal stands from his desk and takes the file out. He flips through it, scanning the pages for details. Once he has what he needs to know, he stands in front of the glass separation. He stares into her eyes, tilting his head.

“Quid pro quo. I tell you things. You tell me things about yourself, not this case. Quid pro quo. Yes or no?”

She debates it internally.

“Yes or no, Clarice?”

“Go, Doctor.”

“What is your worst memory of childhood?” He strikes a soft spot immediately.

Clarice doesn’t hesitate to answer, “The death of my father.”

“Tell me about it.”

“He was a town Marshall. One night he surprised two burglars coming out of the back of a drug store. They shot him.”

“Was he killed outright?”

“No, he was strong. Lasted more than a month,” She takes a breath, “My mother died when I was very young so my father had become the whole world to me. When he left me, I had nothing. I was ten years old.”

Hannibal naturally licks his lips. Clarice’s trait of being straightforward reminds him of Will, much like everything she does. Even without the promise of another cell, he would still most likely help her. Just for the sheer pleasure of imagining it’s Will.

“You’re very frank, Clarice. I think it would be quite something to know you outside of these walls.”

“Quid pro quo, Doctor.”

Hannibal smirks and nods, “Tell me about Miss West Virginia. Her physical attributes.”

“Tall, large,” It displeases Clarice to speak of these girls like nothing but bodies but she does.

“What else?”

“She had an object deliberately inserted into her throat. We don’t know what it means.”

“Was it a butterfly?” Hannibal asks, which slightly surprised Clarice.

“Yes, a moth. Just like the one we found in Benjamin Raspel’s, or Miss Mofet’s, head an hour ago. Why does he place them there, Doctor?”

“The significance of the moth is change. Caterpillar into chrysalis, and then from. sent a beauty. Billy, too, wants change.”

“There’s no correlation between being transgender and violence. Trans people are very passive.”

Hannibal nods, knowing that already without her pointing it out, “You’re so close to the way you’re going to catch him. Do you realize that?”

“No, tell me why.”

“After your father’s murder, you were orphaned. What happened next?”

Clarice looks down at her shoes. She hates the way her private childhood stories are being made into treats for Hannibal to eat so he corporates.

“I went to live with my mother’s cousin and her husband in Montana. They had a ranch. Sheep and horses.”

“How long did you live there?”

“Two months.”

“Why such a brief trip?”

“I ran away.”

“Why, Clarice?”

“Quid pro quo, Doctor,” Clarice leans forward, intently staring at Hannibal with angry eyes.

Hannibal replies, “Billy is not transgender, but he thinks he is. He tries to be. He’s tried to be many things, I’d expect.”

“And you said that I was very close to the way we would catch him, what did you mean?”

“I wouldn’t be surprised if Billy had applied to one, or several, sex change operation centers and been rejected.”

“On what basis would they reject him?”

“Look for severe childhood disturbances associated with violence. Our Billy wasn’t born a criminal, Clarice. He was made one through years of systematic abuse. Billy hates his own

identity and he thinks that makes him a transgender. But, his pathology is something else. Something savage and terrifying."

Clarice straightens her posture.

"Might I keep the file?" Hannibal asks.

"Yes, it's a copy. So all yours," Clarice stands.

"I apologize if I stepped too far in asking you about your youth, Miss Starling. Curiosity kills the feline and so forth."

"If you plan on doing it again, do not bother apologizing, Doctor."

Hannibal doesn't even hear Clarice, but rather Will's voice speaking to him. It stings.

"Very well," Hannibal breaks eye contact and takes a seat at his desk.

Clarice takes that as her dismissal. She walks away and leaves the building. At the entrance, she is approached by a woman with red hair. No other than Freddie Lounds.

"Excuse me, do you have a moment?" Freddie calls out.

Clarice continues walking, "What is it, ma'am?"

"You've been visiting the BSCHI quite frequently to see Hannibal Lecter, correct? What have you been discussing?"

"I'm not authorized to say. Sorry, but I must go," Clarice opens her car door and gets inside.

Lounds is frustrated but allows her to drive off without anything further.

The hallway door opens once more. Its screeching echoes through the corridor, annoying Hannibal. The click of loafers and heels walk down the hall. Hannibal recognizes the sound of one but not the other. When the two people are in front of his cell, he recognizes the other as Freddie Lounds. Accompanying her is Chilton.

"Dr. Lecter, this is Freddie Lounds. Ms. Lounds, this is Hannibal Lecter," Chilton introduces them.

"Hello, Dr. Lecter. It's a pleasure to meet you," She says.

"I didn't know I'd be meeting with you today, Miss Lounds," His eyes glance at Frederick.

Frederick explains, "I scheduled, quite last minute, you an appointment for an interview to be published on TattleCrime. She'll be asking about your stay in the hospital and your recent activities."

"Do I have the ability to speak about anything I wish?" Hannibal asks, meaning the Buffalo Bill case and Miggs.

“Attempt to not embarrass me in the process, but yes.”

“That won’t upset Jack Crawford?”

“If he wants to have access to you, then he can get over it. Do the interview,” Chilton turns to Freddie, “I’ll leave you to it.”

Chilton makes his way back down the hallway, leaving them two. Hannibal motions for Freddie to sit down in the chair placed before the cell, so she takes a seat. Hannibal remains standing.

“So, Dr. Lecter, it’s been three years since you were arrested for being the Chesapeake Ripper. How has time passed being incarcerated?” She begins the interview.

“The scenery got old quite quickly, but time has passed fine. My imagination has not yet found its limit, so I’m fully capable of keeping myself entertained. Whether I’m sitting back in my own mind, drawing, or reading, I’m able to survive my time in the bowels of the BSCHI.”

She smiles at his wording, “Has the BSCHI been the equivalent of bowels?”

“Frederick does his best. I often purposefully agitate him. One, by accepting interviews with everyone, besides him. As for the BSCHI’s cells, I’ll say they are the equivalent of bowels.”

“I have to say I agree on that part. Tell me, what have these past two weeks looked like for you?”

“In the beginning, it was ordinary. Until Frederick visited me, bringing me a printed article of yours, discussing the newest killer Buffalo Bill. He informed me that I would have a visitor later that day, and I did. One from the FBI. Jack Crawford has resorted to sending me another trainee. This time to ask for my assistance on the Buffalo Bill case.”

“Another trainee— you’re referencing Miriam Lass?”

“Yes.”

“Would you say her death was more personal or less?”

“She was the second to ever cross my path, looking for the Chesapeake Ripper. That brought about a certain personalized connection with her. Her death was not personal to me, however. It was meant to be personal to Jack Crawford and to the FBI in general. I had no attached feelings toward her.”

“Was Will Graham the first to ever cross your path?”

“Yes, he was.”

“But, he came after Miriam Lass went missing?”

Hannibal debates whether or not to discuss Florence. He decides to keep those memories private.

“He’s the one that deserves first place,” He states instead.

Freddie’s curiosity pokes through, “Have you two been in contact at all since the night you were arrested?”

“No, we haven’t,” His voice sounds almost hurt but he stays composed.

“This new trainee, will you tell me her name?” She gets back on topic.

“Agent Starling. If I didn’t have faith in her future, I wouldn’t give you her name. I expect one day she will make a name for herself in the halls of the Bureau.”

“You seem to have a lot of respect for her. Why’s that?”

“She is direct, honest, and has a mutual respect for me. Most enter this hallway and treat me as a lowly specimen when I’m beyond their level of understanding. She did not.”

“You collected a new victim this week, from what I’ve heard.”

“Miggs shouldn’t classify as a victim of mine. He was a pest.”

Freddie asks, “Why did you kill him, or convince him to swallow his tongue?”

“He spoke crudely to Miss Starling. I don’t tolerate disrespect in that way,” Hannibal pauses, “I must admit it was also another personal blow to Jack Crawford for I do enjoy his squirming.”

“How was Miggs personal?”

“Hours before Miggs died, Jack doubted that I posed any threat outside of this cell. I had to remind him that I did.”

Hannibal speaks with zero remorse in his voice. He speaks calmly like they were discussing what to eat for lunch.

“And the Buffalo Bill case. How’s that going?” Freddie continues the interview.

“I won’t discuss any details of the case. All I will say is that I am consulting on the case.”

“That’s alright. Would you mind if I take a picture of you in your cell?” She asks.

Hannibal does a quick overview of his cell, making sure it looks tidy. It does. He turns back to Freddie, “Go ahead.”

She turns on her camera and lifts it to her eye. Hannibal stands, hands folded behind his back. He doesn’t smile but rather just looks into the lens. The camera clicks, taking the picture.

“Thank you for answering my questions, Dr. Lecter. I’d shake your hand but the circumstances don’t allow for that,” Freddie smiles at him.

He returns the smile, “It’s been a pleasure. Have Chilton show me the article when it’s published.”

“Will do. Goodbye,” Freddie leaves.

The next morning, the article is published on TattleCrime. Frederick brings Hannibal a paper copy of the article.

“Thank you for choosing Jack to humiliate rather than me,” He slides the paper through to Hannibal.

“You’ve done well, Frederick,” Hannibal takes the article and reads through it, “Has Jack reached out yet?”

“He is probably yelling at Lounds over the phone as we speak. Then, we shall be next.”

“I look forward to it.”

“Of course you do.”

Hannibal looks up at Chilton, “There is no need to worry, Frederick. You had no control over what I said or what Miss Lounds wrote, and Jack has no control over your hospital.”

Chilton nods, trying to listen to what Hannibal is saying and find comfort in his words.

“Enjoy the article,” He says and leaves Hannibal alone.

-

Surrounded by his dogs, Will scrolls through his email. He sips on some whiskey and clears through any spam he has. As he scrolls back up to the top, a new email is sent to him. It’s directly from Freddie Lounds. How she got his email, he’s unsure. He clicks on the email and it’s just a link to her new article. There’s no message beyond the article. Will presses the link, against his better judgment. After opening, he sees the title in bold.

Hannibal Lecter: The FBI’s New Consultant

Chapter End Notes

> I just want to clarify that all dialogue about Buffalo Bill being trans was taken from the movie Silence of the Lambs. I’m not entirely sure if any of the wording is offensive. I, myself, am not trans so I’m not able to tell. If it is, my apologies for including it.

Update: I did update the dialogue to make it more correct. Thank you to user Crying_face_down_in_a_puddle for informing me!

Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

What you've been waiting for… Some more Will & Hannibal :))

The article follows her and Hannibal's conversation without straying much. Spread throughout are comments she wanted to add to create more drama, beyond Hannibal's blatant comments toward Jack.

Will reads the title and his throat goes dry. He scrolls down slightly and sees the picture Freddie took of Hannibal in his cell. Since his move away from Wolf Trap, he hasn't seen a picture of Hannibal. To see him in a cell, skinnier and with an almost drained appearance, is shocking. The condition Hannibal is in sickens him. He refills his whiskey glass and decides to read the article, curious about what Hannibal is consulting on.

Like the interview, the article begins with Hannibal talking about how he passes the time, Chilton, and how he dislikes his cell. Then, Freddie asks about what his past few weeks have been like. Freddie goes into how Jack Crawford sent a trainee to seek help from Hannibal. She criticizes Jack's decision to send a trainee rather than a seasoned agent, which Will agrees with.

Freddie transitions the article into Miriam Lass and quotes Hannibal's statement on how Miriam wasn't personal for him but rather Jack and how she was the second to find him. At this point in the article, Freddie includes direct quotes.

FL: Was Will Graham the first to ever cross your path?

HL: Yes, he was.

FL: But, he came after Miriam Lass went missing?

HL: He's the one that deserves first place.

Will can feel the hesitation in Hannibal's mind to discuss Florence. He's sure Hannibal would've liked to have someone to talk about that with, but instead, he chose to keep it to himself.

FL: Have you two been in contact at all since the night you were arrested?

HL: No, we haven't.

After sitting through Dr. Lecter's trial and viewing videos of him at conferences, I can't help but mention he shifted in his demeanor while speaking of Will Graham. The air sunk for a moment, at least as much as it could considering the filthy concrete block we were in.

Will's eyes glance to his desk drawer where all of the letters lay in wait. He feels called out and as if Hannibal's eyes are watching him. He thinks about how Hannibal said Will is the one who deserves to be recognized first. He hates it, but he feels flattered and to know Hannibal still thinks highly of him means everything.

Freddie Lounds moves into discussion over the new trainee. After Hannibal states her name, Freddie included a section of description of Clarice Starling which says her college, appearance, and background. Freddie quotes how Hannibal describes that he has much respect for Clarice and believes she will one day dominate her field. Lounds moves to the topic of Miggs who Hannibal admits he killed for Clarice and to prove something to Jack. Will can't help but feel jealousy in his heart.

The article closes out with Hannibal declining to share details with Freddie about the Buffalo Bill case. She signs out by thanking Hannibal for such an insightful interview and complimenting how kind and approachable he was. Will clicks off the tab and sits there. He sips his whiskey and then crosses his arms.

Hannibal killed another inmate because they said something rude to Clarice. He made someone swallow their tongue from the next room because they were rude to the trainee. Something similar to anger grows in Will's gut over that, which angers Will even more for being mad Hannibal did such a thing for another person.

He opens the drawer and pulls out the top letter that he received the other day. Carefully he opens the letter. Inside is folded drawing paper. Will unfolds it to reveal a drawing of Will's back as he was viewing books in Hannibal's office library. It's from the day Will surprised Hannibal with an appointment.

Signed at the bottom is, *Hope you're doing well. - H.L.*

Short and simple. Nonetheless, sweet. Will traces the H.L. with his pointer finger and a smile grows on his face. Quickly, he wipes it away and folds the paper back. His mind is distracted again by the thought of Clarice Starling. The thought of her replacing him in Hannibal's mind is something he finds unbearable. Tearing himself apart from the inside out, his emotions go wild, fighting between mad at them and mad at himself for being mad.

As for Hannibal, he enjoyed the article. Not so much the comment on his emotional reaction to the mention of Will Graham. He doesn't need Jack using it to strike back. Overall though, he was pleased that Lounds stuck to the conversation and even criticized Jack herself.

Hannibal goes a day without any visitors, which is almost relaxing after having so many the previous days. It switches back to chaotic soon however. The day after the article is

published, Chilton visits Hannibal.

“Hannibal, you have an offer.”

Hannibal looks up at him with an eyebrow raised.

“Senator Martin, the mother of the girl Buffalo Bill has taken, has offered to fly you to Tennessee to speak with her. In exchange for the name of Buffalo Bill, you will be allowed to visit a museum and garden in Memphis as well as a high quality meal. When you come back to the BSCHI, your new cell will be ready to go,” Chilton explains.

“Does Jack Crawford know about this deal?” Hannibal asks.

“No, he doesn’t.”

“I’m sure he wouldn’t enjoy the case being ripped from his hands.”

“You would.”

Hannibal considers Clarice and how well she’s done. He doesn’t want to do that to her. However, it wouldn’t be personal. He would just love a vacation.

“I accept the deal.”

“Good, you fly out in a few hours.”

Hannibal nods.

In a couple of hours, Hannibal is put into a straitjacket with a white face mask to prevent any attempts to escape. While orderlies are putting him into the jacket, Hannibal manages to pickpocket a pen. He hides it in his sleeve for later.

He is wheeled on a dolly to a transport van. Chilton doesn’t ride with him, just in case something goes wrong. Hannibal is driven to an airport where he is put on a private airplane. For the airplane ride, Chilton rides on the same plane. Hannibal is placed in a cage on the plane so Chilton feels safe.

On the plane, Chilton gets a call from Jack and he’s yelled at over the phone. Chilton explains it was the best option to save Catherine Martin’s life and says that Hannibal will be held in Tennessee until Buffalo Bill is caught. The call is soon over because Jack hangs up on Chilton.

In Quantico, Jack is sitting at his desk, head in his hands. Clarice sits across from him, not sure how to help. Jack looks up at her and sighs, “None of this is your fault. It’s Hannibal and Chilton.”

“I know, sir.”

“Hannibal has to spite me and Chilton wants people to know his name, so he'll do whatever best suits that goal,” Jack rants.

Clarice suggests, “I can go to Tennessee and try to get last minute information out of Hannibal, if you want me to.”

There’s a knock at Jack’s door and they both look up at the door. Entering the office is Will.

Jack immediately stands, “Will.”

“Jack.”

“What are you doing here?” Jack walks over to him.

“He’s in Tennessee?” Will asks.

Jack nods, “Made a deal with a senator to give them a name of a serial killer.”

“Buffalo Bill.”

“You’ve been keeping up?”

“No, Freddie Lounds emailed me her recent article and I studied what I could find on the Buffalo Bill case on the flight here.”

“Freddie Lounds—”

Will cuts him off, “Let me go to Tennessee and help, Jack.”

“You’re not FBI anymore, Will.”

“She’s not either,” Will responds. He hasn’t yet looked at Clarice, “Hannibal isn’t going to give them anything. He’s playing a game. I’ll go, report back what I find, and then you can go catch Buffalo Bill.”

Jack looks at Will, contemplating what to do. He looks over at Clarice, who is silent. She’s watching Will as well.

“Starling, do you have an objection?” Jack asks before deciding.

“No, sir. He understands Lecter. If he believes he can get something from him to help save Catherine, that’s what matters,” She replies.

“Okay,” Jack rubs his face and turns to Will, “Let’s get you temporary identification.”

Will nods. Jack takes him to a certain section of the Bureau to get him registered. Clarice tags along. While waiting for the ID to print, Jack gets Will the next plane ticket to Memphis. Once the ID is ready, he hands it to Will. Jack looks at Will and pulls him closer to get in his face.

“I want you to be careful. You’ve been out of the game for so long, Will. Protect your mind. Any defenses you have, put them up. Offenses too,” Jack advises.

“I know, Jack.”

“Good luck.”

Will goes to his car and hurries to the airport to catch his flight.

Hannibal soon arrives in Memphis and the Senator meets him in the airplane hangar. Chilton walks beside Hannibal while he’s rolled over to Senator Martin. Chilton introduces them to one another.

“Dr. Lecter, I brought you the documents that promise that I’ll provide you with the rewards I stated. You might want to read over them to ensure you agree to the terms,” The Senator has someone hand the papers to Chilton.

“I won’t waste your time or Catherine’s time bargaining for petty privileges. Jack Crawford have wasted far too much time already. I only hope they haven’t doomed the poor girl. Let me help you now, and I’ll trust you when this is all over.”

“You have my word.”

“Buffalo Bill’s real name is Louis Friend. I met him only once after he was referred to me by my patient Benjamin Raspail. They were lovers. Raspail became frightened after Louis killed a woman and did *things* with her skin.”

A man chimes in, “We need his address and a physical description.”

“5 foot 10, strongly built, 180 pounds, blond hair, and blue eyes. He’d be about 35 now. Then he said he lived in Philadelphia, but he may have lied. That is all I can remember, but if I think of anything else, I will let you know.”

Hannibal is afterward transported to a courthouse where he is held in a large room with a cell inside. It’s spacious, but the lack of privacy is atrocious. He feels like a bird inside a cage, and that’s what it looks like as well. He’s relieved when he’s taken out of the straitjacket and the mask is removed. Sitting on the table, waiting for him, are books, a drawing pad, and the Buffalo Bill case file. After being taken out of his jacket, he hid the pen in his palm. When he is alone, he takes apart the pen and holds onto the pen tip for later.

It doesn’t take long for Will to arrive in Memphis, but it’s nightfall before he does. He gets a cab from the airport to the courthouse. To find where Hannibal was being was simple. All he had to do was stop and look at a TV in the airport that was on the news channel.

When he arrives, Will can see Chilton happily giving interviews and answering questions about Lecter to any reporter or journalist who is there. Will finds it pathetic. He goes inside. In the atrium of the courthouse are two officers at a desk, checking in those who wish to go upstairs.

“Are you part of Dr. Chilton’s group?” One officer asks.

“Well, I just saw him outside,” Will responds.

“Access to Lecter is strictly limited. We’ve been getting death threats.”

“I understand.”

They look at his identification. Will looks at the officer’s with eyes that resemble that of a puppy, but not in a cringe embarrassing way. It comes naturally to him. The officer gives in.

“Log in.”

Will does. He didn’t bring any weapon to check in, so he just goes up the elevator. Before entering the room with Lecter, an officer goes over the rules with Will. Will nods along. The officer lets him go in.

As enters the room, he has a surreal feeling floating through his chest. Almost like he’s gone outside for the first time after being trapped inside all week, or like a teenager who goes on the swings for the first time in years. He sees Hannibal from across the room, but Hannibal’s back is turned from the entrance and he’s reading.

Will makes his way to the cage, his boots tapping softly against the ground, and the officer keeping watch walks away to give Will his space. The cage is bordered by caution signs, prohibiting anyone from stepping too close to the cell. Will steps as close as he can and just looks at Hannibal’s back.

Slowly, Hannibal closes the book and sets it down. Will walks around the cage and Hannibal turns his chair to meet the rotation in the middle. The two meet eyes immediately and their old connection is fully restored. Hannibal’s lips turn into a smirk, whether he realizes it or not. He’s glad to see Will. After all this time, it’s all he’s wanted. Will is the only view he’s truly craved during his time underground.

“William,” His name slips from Hannibal’s mouth.

“Dr. Lecter.”

Hannibal frowns, upset that he’s resorted to formalities.

“Are we no longer on a first-name basis?”

“Not after you gutted me, no.”

“Have you read any of my letters or did you dispose of them?” Hannibal asks.

“I opened one. The most recent one. The others are unopened, sitting in a drawer.”

“I’m glad you kept them.”

Will changes the subject, “I’m here about Buffalo Bill.”

“I knew someone would be sent to talk to me, but I assumed it would be Clarice Starling. Though, you always knew how to surprise.”

“She was going to come but I took her spot.”

Hannibal squints his eyes slightly, “You have a hint of distaste for Miss Starling. I can hear it in the back of your throat.”

“You said his name was Louis Friend, but we both know it’s not.”

“Have you read the case file, Will?”

“Jack wouldn’t give me a copy.”

Hannibal gathers his copy and slips it through the bars. Will takes it and hopes the officers didn’t see him break the rules. He opens the file and scans through, taking note of Hannibal’s annotations.

“Everything you need to find Buffalo Bill is right there in those pages.”

“Sounds simple enough.”

“Simplicity— Of each particular thing ask what is it in itself? What is its nature? What does he do, Buffalo Bill?”

Will looks at the images of the bodies that were skinned and his mind travels to a place he hasn’t been in quite some time.

Every day, I see you. The perfect size, equaling your demise. You are not the reason but rather nature has brought me to your step. Your anatomy is what I need. Carefully with artistry, I cut sections off. You will no longer need them. However, I do. With each one like you, I take parts and piece them together in my puzzle. Once the parts are collected, I’ll be whole and become a new me. My transformation will be complete.

“He’s seeking transformation. These girls are his ticket to reaching it. Buffalo Bill knew the first victim.”

Hannibal’s eyes look at Will, gleaming with pleasure. To his Will’s mind in action feels like a blessing. It’s rare to see such a gift in person.

“Does your distaste of Clarice stem from jealousy, Will? I’m assuming you stepped back into the ring due to Miss Lounds’ article.”

“I’m not jealous.”

“Tell me, Will. Was it because I killed for her?” Hannibal’s tone darkens.

The sound of Hannibal’s voice sinks into Will’s mind. His cells and nerves soak up the melody, becoming drunk over the noise. Will whispers, looking into Hannibal’s eyes, “Yes.”

“You sweet boy. William, one day we will discuss this further. Here is not the place, I regretfully say.”

Will nods.

Hannibal asks, “Do you plan on going after Buffalo Bill, or will you go back to your home in Maine?”

“I have no interest in Buffalo Bill. When I’m finished here, I’ll report to Jack and go home.”

“You only came to see me,” Hannibal says like a question but it’s also him informing himself of that.

Will nods and returns to a whisper, “If I’m honest, I don’t see you remaining here much longer.”

“Why’s that?” Hannibal tilts his head with a smirk.

“Your deal won’t hold up. They’ll know you lied before you are given privileges. So either you did all this for nothing except to take a little trip, or you have something up your sleeve. And you always have something planned. I believe me coming here only sealed the plan in place.”

“And you feared I was replacing you with Clarice… How could I ever meet someone who could compare to you?” Hannibal looks at Will with a proud smile.

“Where will you go?”

Hannibal breathes in through his nose and then exhales softly, thinking about his future plans.

“Tell me, do you plan to look for me?”

Will replies, “I don’t think I’m capable of not.”

Hannibal stands from his chair and walks to the bars. He wishes to reach out to Will. Only then will he be confident that Will is truly in front of him. To feel Will’s warmth in his hands has felt like a distant memory for so long, but now it’s a possibility again.

Seeing their inability to be closer hurts Will’s soul. None of this would be happening if he didn’t reject Hannibal, but he couldn’t let Hannibal get off the hook. Will had to see Hannibal arrested. He needed to for his own sake. If he didn’t, all of his stress and frustration would’ve been for nothing.

“We have much to discuss after we are far from this place,” Hannibal sighs, “Until then.”

“It was good to see you, Hannibal.”

Hannibal just smiles, letting the words soak in.

As if on cue, Chilton walks in with officers at his side. He laughs, “Will Graham, funny seeing you here.”

“Frederick.”

“I thought you cut ties with the FBI, but since you got in, I’m assuming you are doing Jack’s bidding. Though, I bet it’s more personal than that.”

Will puts on his glasses then tucks his hands in his pockets, case file tucked under his arm.

“Jack wanted last minute info from Hannibal. I showed up at the perfect time and took Agent Starling’s spot coming here.”

“I would’ve preferred seeing her,” Chilton laughs, “Anyway, time to go, Mr. Graham. I do hate to separate you two after your long-awaited reunion, but you aren’t allowed here.”

Will looks at Hannibal, telling him goodbye with his eyes. Hannibal returns the glance.

Chilton has officers escort Will out. When Will is out of the room, Chilton turns to Hannibal.

“You two would be excellent for a study. I can only imagine what goes on in your heads when you see each other. How was seeing him?”

“Frederick, if you only ask to document my behavior, then do not bother. I do not wish to comment on me reuniting with Mr. Graham.”

“You pain me, Hannibal.”

“Might I request a second dinner? After all, I am assisting in helping find young Catherine.”

“Mmm, alright.”

“Thank you, Frederick.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Chilton mumbles as he walks out of the room.

When he is alone, except for the officers, Hannibal plays a cassette tape of Bach’s Goldberg Variations. He takes a seat at the desk, eyes closed, basking in the sweet sound of the piano. In a few minutes, his second dinner is brought to him.

An officer announces, “Here you are, Doc.”

Hannibal pushes himself up from his seat by putting his hands on the desk. While doing so, he grabs the tip of the pen and hides it in between his fingers.

“Good evening,” He smiles.

“Same drill as before please,” Another officer directs.

Hannibal moves to the cage’s bars and slides down to the floor, sitting against them. He places his hands behind his back, through the bars.

“Ready when you are.”

One of the officers go behind Hannibal and cuff him. As the officers unlock the cage and step inside to bring him his plate, Hannibal uses the pen to unlock the handcuffs. They go to place

the dinner on his desk but Hannibal stops them.

“Mind the drawing please.”

On the desk is a large, half-completed sketch of a castle. The officer holding his plate sets the dish on the ground beside Hannibal. He then carefully rolls the sketch up and moves it. As the officer bends down to pick up the plate, Hannibal attaches the handcuffs to the officer. He gives him a small smirk before all havoc is unleashed.

Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

A wholesome chapter.

The officer calls out, “Jimmy, watch it. He’s got me!”

Hannibal turns his attention to the one named Jimmy, kicking the cell door into him to keep him back. He quickly rises to his feet and grabs Jimmy’s face. Hannibal bites into the side of the man’s face. After tearing into his flesh, Hannibal bangs the man’s head against the metal bars. The other officer yells at Hannibal, but is unable to get out of the cuffs. Hannibal grabs Jimmy’s mace and sprays him in the eye. Once he’s done, he allows Jimmy to fall to the floor in agony.

He picks up a baton dropped by the officer. While Bach still plays in the background, he raises the baton above his head and brings it down upon the officer cuffed to the bars. With grace, he bludgeons the man, sending the officer into an nonharmonic fit of groaning. Blood is splattered onto Hannibal’s white jumpsuit. When the officer is dead, Hannibal stops.

His attention is once again brought back to the sound of classical music filling the room. He shuts his eyes and his hand subconsciously plays along to the piano. A grunt breaks him from his concentration. Hannibal turns around and scans the cell. He sees that Jimmy is crawling away from the scene.

Looking for a weapon, Hannibal grabs a switchblade that the deceased officer had on him. As he walks over to Jimmy, again repeating the phrase, “Ready when you are.”

Swiftly and with elegance, the man who attempted to flee was gutted. His torso was sliced and a circular patch of skin expanding over the entire abdomen was removed. One by one, his organs dropped out until none remained. Using nearby materials, the officer was strung up on the cage, hanging by his arms. The same material was also used to tie a noose around his neck to keep his head upright. Laying on the ground, pretending to be dead, the culprit is able to escape. Not long does it take for the mistake to be realized, but by that time, the culprit is long gone, leaving behind more bodies.

Will stands in the middle of Hannibal’s cell alongside Jack. Jack looks at Will, who is unrolling the drawing on Hannibal’s desk.

“Did you know he was going to escape?” Jack asks.

Will sees that the unfinished sketch is of a castle. Signed at the bottom is— *A place I cannot return to alone. - H.L.*

It's an invitation. Will only has to discover where it leads.

"I knew he was planning something, but I didn't know what exactly," Will lies, knowing Hannibal was going to escape that night.

Jack hits the cage with the side of his fist, "If Chilton wasn't incompetent, this wouldn't have happened."

"My report will find you Catherine Martin. Don't listen to what he told the Senator. Just go find the girl. Let Starling catch Buffalo Bill."

"And what will you do?"

"I'm going home."

"That's it? You come back to speak to him and then you're gone again?"

"Yep," Will rolls the sketch up and leaves the cell with the drawing.

Jack doesn't stop him from taking it, or stop him in general. He lets Will go, worried for Will's well-being but he knows he couldn't stop Will even if he begged. After Will gets out of the building and finds a cab to take him to the airport, he gets a phone call from Beverly.

"Hello?" He answers.

"You were in the building, in Jack's office, and you didn't come by and see me!" Beverly gets onto him.

"I was only inside for a couple of minutes before I was gone again. Sorry, Bev."

"Are you coming back?"

"No, I'm heading to the Memphis airport and going back home."

"Not even staying to claim that you're the one who basically broke the case open?"

"Freddie Lounds has probably already published something about it."

"I miss you, Will. Take care of yourself. You hear me?"

"Yes, ma'am."

Beverly sighs, "Be good. Stay out of trouble. If you ever need me, I'll be on the first flight there."

"Thank you. I'll try to keep in touch."

"Sure you will. Talk to you later, Will," Beverly hangs up.

Will arrives at the airport and catches a plane to Portland. When he gets back, Will goes home immediately. He had a coworker from down by the ports come and feed the dogs while

he was gone. For about an hour straight, he just plays and cuddles with the dogs. Once they're settled and used to him being back, Will sits on the couch with his laptop. He unrolls the sketch and looks at the details of the castle.

The sketch shows a castle in its prime. It towers above the land, making the trees seem small. In front of the castle, keeping outsiders from coming in, is a gate. On said gate are two crests. Both crests have impressive minute details, carefully drawn by Hannibal. The crests have an image of wolves, a snake, and wings sprouting flowers carved into them. In the center, written in very small print, is *Lekteris - Dvaras* .

Will translates the word dvaras and sees that it means manor or court. So, Lecter Manor. The title is primarily used by nobility. He sets the sketch to the side and looks up on Google, Lekteris Dvaras. Not much pops up but an address to a castle in Lithuania. There's not much information on the history of the castle, but he finds old news about it being an orphanage at some point. He squints and glances over at the sketch.

A place I cannot return to alone .

"We have much to discuss after we are far from this place… Until then."

Hannibal will be waiting for Will in Lithuania, his birthplace. He won't be found at the castle however. Somewhere close rather. The way he dictates how he can't return alone means he wants to go back with Will. He wants Will to accompany him home. Will cannot leave him waiting by himself. Though, what's he to do about the dogs?

He doesn't want to give up the dogs, but he doesn't have a way to care for them if he goes on this trip. Will pouts and sits back to contemplate. He's good friends with those who sell products from their farms at the nearby market. They'd be able to take care of the dogs. They could provide land and have enough income to feed them. It would be temporary. Will can't abandon his dogs. He'd have to wait and see how the Hannibal situation unfolds to know how long it would be until he can pick the dogs up.

Will spends the rest of the day with the dogs and the next day, he goes to the market and asks people for favors. He manages to find two separate people who are willing to take care of a few of his dogs. His dogs are split into two groups. 3 go to one and 2 go to the other person. He thanks him and pays them both each $300 in advance. Before leaving, he tells them that if they need anything, he will wire them money.

Once the dogs are handed over, Will heads back home and begins to pack. He stuffs as many clothes into his suitcase as he can fit. In a carry on bag, he packs his laptop, the drawing, and any other necessities. His flight isn't until tomorrow but he is prepared and anxious to get going.

Tomorrow, Will heads to the airport. He has an entire day of flying ahead of him. To get to Lithuania, he must take two connecting flights. It's a complicated process but he manages to eventually arrive in the country. He sets down in Vilnius, the capital. After arriving, he has to take a train to the region of Aukštaitija. The Lecter Castle is on the outskirts of a very small town. Will imagines that Hannibal would settle there while waiting for Will to join him.

In the town, there's only one inn but several pubs and restaurants. Will arrives in town late at night, or better said, early morning. He carries his bag into the inn and asleep at the front desk is an older gentleman. Will awkwardly tries to make some noise to wake up the man.

The man wakes up with a yawn and looks up at Will. He mumbles something directed to Will in Lithuanian and Will has no clue what.

"Sorry, I have no clue what you said. Do you speak English or Italian, perhaps?" Will asks.

Again, the man mumbles in Lithuanian, but this time it sounds like an insult about Will rather than addressing him. No matter, he nods.

"Yeah, room?" He asks.

Will nods, "Has a tall man, a few years older than me, strong facial structure checked in recently?"

"Picture?"

Will digs for his phone and looks up a picture of Hannibal from before he was caught. He shows it to the man. The man nods, "Yeah, upstairs."

"Do you think you could take me to his room?"

The worker squints his eyes at Will, "One bed."

"I will rent a room also. How much?"

Will is given a price, which he pays for in cash. Before getting on the train, he stopped and exchanged US currency for euros. When Will pays, the man takes him upstairs to his room then after Will sets down his things, he points out Hannibal's room. Will thanks him.

Will walks down the hall to Hannibal's room and takes a deep breath while standing outside his door. Softly, he knocks. Inside the room is the sound of sheets shuffling then the sound of feet approaching the door. The door opens slightly, enough to peek out of. Then, the door opens wider to reveal Hannibal.

Hannibal steps aside for Will to come in. His hair is messy and he's in sweatpants with a sweater on top. Will steps into the dark room, lit only by the moonlight, and the door is closed behind him.

"You came," Hannibal's voice sounds raspy.

"The hunt called my name," Will replies.

Will looks up at Hannibal, admiring how the moonlit extenuates his cheekbones. Hannibal smiles with a lift up his upper lip. Immediately, he strikes deep at Will's thoughts.

"If the hunt calls for you, why did you leave the FBI?" Hannibal asks.

“Because out of all that calls for me, your melody was the only one that interested me. No other can match your artistry. You’ve created a standard that wouldn’t allow me to return to hunt.”

“I’m glad I could assist you in acquiring some taste.”

“You’ve resorted back to having sass like you did in Florence. Didn’t know being under Chilton’s watch could do that to a person.”

“You rubbed off on me.”

“Fair.”

Hannibal reaches out toward Will’s face and hovers his hand above Will’s cheek. Paranoid that if he touches Will, the dream will come to an end and Will will no longer be in front of him. Will puts his hand on the back of Hannibal’s and pushes his hand against his cheek. The touch sends sparks down Hannibal’s fingertips to his wrist then to his shoulder. For three years, he’s wanted to touch Will’s face once more. He feared the day wouldn’t come again.

Hannibal moves his other hand to cup Will’s face. He so loves to have Will’s head in his hands. The sides of his lips curl upward and he pulls Will in close. Rather than kissing him, Hannibal brings Will into a hug. He moves his hands to the back of Will’s head and holds him. Will buries his head in Hannibal’s neck. Something in Will feels like a pressure on his lungs has been lifted for the first time in years.

“Don’t gut me this time,” Will jokes.

Genuine and soft, Hannibal laughs.

“I do apologize for that, Will. My emotions might have gotten the best of me.”

“You don’t say.”

Hannibal loosens the embrace and looks into Will’s eyes. Those sweet eyes that reflect the moonlight and hold inside their own galaxy. He moves his hands to Will’s waist and leads him to the bed to sit down. When Will is seated, Hannibal gets on his knees and unties Will’s boots to slip them off. He places them side by side at the foot of the bed. Will just watches him.

He slips off Will’s jacket and lays it on the bed. Next, he untucks Will’s thick button up shirt and begins to unbutton it slowly, looking into Will’s eyes the entire time. Hannibal removes the button up, leaving Will in his last layer of a white t-shirt. He stands and folds the clothes and sets them aside.

“You’ve had a long journey. Please, lay back and get comfortable.”

Will scoots over by the pillows and leans back against them.

Hannibal turns to Will, “Do you need anything? Water? Tea, perhaps?”

Will shakes his head and reaches out his hand for Hannibal to take hold of. Hannibal happily grabs his hand. Will pulls Hannibal on him, having him straddle his waist. He grabs Hannibal's head and pulls him down to kiss him. Unlike their previous kisses, this one is not paced but rather impatient. Too long have their lips been waiting to reunite. It's a desperate cling to one another. Separation is not a willing action.

Will buries his fingers in Hannibal's hair, messing his hair up even more than it already was. Hannibal keeps himself supported by placing his hands on the bed next to Will's head. Their kiss remains consistently hungry with minimal breaks until Hannibal parts to move down Will's neck. He puts more weight on Will's hips, holding himself stable on his hips.

Inch by inch, Hannibal travels down Will's neck with small suckish kisses. Will's eyes close and his head moves out of Hannibal's way, extending his neck. Slightly, his back arches. Hannibal slides his hands under Will's shirt, slowly pushing it upward. His thumbs, while moving up Will's abdomen, run over his scar that Hannibal gifted to him. Hannibal's kisses come to a halt.

Will opens his eyes to watch Hannibal. Hannibal pushes Will's shirt far up to the top of his chest. Will takes his shirt off for Hannibal and tosses somewhere on the floor. Hannibal inspects Will's scar. Gently, he drags his finger along the scar.

"Could've made it more symmetrical," Will makes another joke about Hannibal gutting him.

Hannibal cracks a smile while sighing. He bends down to softly kiss the scar.

"Not often do I find myself feeling regret. Though, life without regret would be no life at all," Hannibal whispers.

"You regret what you did?"

"I reject that it caused you pain and caused us three years apart."

"Would you change the outcome if you could?"

"No, there's no reason to wish to alter the past. It'll only bring dwelling in your guilt and regret. Though, if I could," Hannibal pauses and Will listens intently, "I would've made it more symmetrical."

Will smiles and pulls Hannibal beside him. He turns over to his side to face Hannibal.

"I wouldn't change a thing either," Will admits, "It allowed me satisfaction, like you said it would. It also showed me what had been filling a hole in me for years."

Will kisses Hannibal in a calm manner. After, the two engage in another embrace and soon fall asleep in that way. They sleep peacefully through the night, not awakening until around noon. Despite the cold winter of Lithuania filling the room's air, Will remains warm due to Hannibal's body temperature.

Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

The final one. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The afternoon sun bursts through the window of the small inn room. Its light provides a beam of warmth down the center of the room. Hannibal is the first to awaken. Carefully, not to wake Will, he slips out of bed to put on a pair of slippers. He leaves the room and returns a few minutes later, carrying two disposable cups of coffee.

As he sets the cups down on the nightstand beside the bed, Will stretches and rolls over to the side of the nightstand. His eyes slowly open and he squints at the sunlight. It takes several blinks for him to remember where he is, who he is, and who Hannibal is. He extends his hand and grips the coffee cup. Hannibal watches him in amusement.

Will sits up, pulling the blankets up with him. He sips on the coffee and uses the cup itself as a source of warmth. Hannibal goes over to Will's jacket and grabs Will's room key. He leaves the room and returns with Will's bags. Will looks at Hannibal as he opens Will's bags and picks Will out an outfit.

Will decides to pick more fun at Hannibal, "No breakfast?"

Hannibal raises his eyebrows, furrowing them as well, and looks over at Will. His mouth opens slightly before speaking, "Apologies, let me go kill the innkeeper. Sausage or ham?"

"Hannibal the Cannibal."

He stands up and carries the clothes he picked out for Will over to an ironing board. He gets his clothes ready for Will, and then gets his own clothes ready. Will enjoys just sitting there and having things done for him.

"You're eager to get going," Will gets up.

"Wouldn't call it eagerness to go back, but rather an anxious prep."

Will takes hold of Hannibal's face and looks into his eyes. It's the second time he's seen a sense of fear in Hannibal. Both times, it unsettles Will. Underneath that anxiety, Will recognizes a hint of sadness. The same sadness he saw in Hannibal's room after he asked about the picture of the little girl. The afterthought about how Hannibal never got that picture back causes guilt to fill Will's gut. Quickly, he tries to brush that off and focus on Hannibal's needs.

“Remember you’re not alone, ok? There’s no reason to fear returning because we’re in it together. I don’t know what is awaiting us but it’s nothing we can’t approach together,” Will whispers to him.

Hannibal is in a defensive state of mind, so his response is sort of jarring.

“Why are you here?” He questions.

“Like someone I know once said, the human mind’s complication is something we do not understand. Only one person is able to understand him, and likewise, only one person is able to understand me— you. It’s an unexpected, illogical bond, but a bond nonetheless. We are connected. We attempted to survive without each other and it was miserable, so we have to survive together.”

Will’s words manage to push Hannibal’s defenses at bay for the moment. Hannibal takes a deep breath in and nods.

“You can change in the bathroom, if you prefer,” He changes the subject.

“Okay,” Will picks up his clothes and goes into the bathroom.

As he walks away, Hannibal watches Will’s back. Will, since he returned to working as a mechanic, has built up a stronger muscle definition. Most likely due to lifting motors all day. Will’s hair has grown as well. Like an animal who grows its coat for the winter, Will does the same. It’s charming to Hannibal to see Will’s most genuine self.

While Will changes in the bathroom, Hannibal changes in the main area. When Will exits the bathroom, Hannibal is combing his hair. Due to being in prison, Hannibal has a shorter haircut. It settles easily without much work. In the front, only in a small section, Hannibal’s hair has begun to turn a beautiful silver. Perfectly, it blends with the coloring of the rest of his hair, complimenting him. Will smiles at the sign of humanity in Hannibal.

Both are dressed in outfits of the same colors. Though Hannibal wears a sweater and a jacket over, while Will wears a button up and a trench coat. They both have matching gloves as well. Hannibal smirks at Will wearing what he picked out. The two finish their coffees before heading out.

Hannibal walks Will downstairs and while leaving, speaks to the innkeeper for a small bit. Will doesn’t understand anything they say. Hannibal walks with Will outside. He looks at Hannibal for clarification.

“I asked him this morning if they had any cars I could borrow,” Hannibal turns the corner of the inn and there awaits an older car that’s in great shape, “He said yes.”

Hannibal opens the door to the car and checks the visor for the key. Right when he opens it, the key falls out. He takes a seat in the driver’s side and Will hops in the passenger’s seat. Hannibal starts the car and departs from the inn.

“So that castle, estate, whatever, is that where you grew up?” Will asks.

“Yes,” Hannibal doesn’t expand.

Will doesn’t ask him too.

The drive takes about twenty minutes to reach the front gates. When they drive up to the gates, the wear on the castle and the property in general is obvious. Whereas Hannibal’s sketch did the estate justice even while being incomplete, the in-person sighting is almost heartbreaking. It’s been abandoned and forgotten. Lost to the hands of time. Its imposing height, brought partially down to crumble.

Hannibal parks the car and for a second just stares at the gates. Quietly, he speaks.

“It’s not healing to see your childhood home, but it helps you measure whether you are broken, how and why.”

“Is this where it all began?” Will asks.

“My construction?” Hannibal thinks, “My memory palace— the place where I can find solitude and peace away from the distractions of the world— holds many rooms. Some rooms hold sound and motion. Others are static and fragmentary.”

“The rooms you can’t bring yourself to go. Nothing escapes from them that causes you any comfort.”

“Screams fill some of those places, but the corridors do not echo screaming… because I hear music. To defend oneself from dangerous, toxic gases that release the worst of our memories, one has to build their own corridors to allow for separation and control.”

“Are you here to build more corridors?”

“I’m here to fill my lungs, my corridors, with the toxin and expose myself to what began my palace. I will breathe the fumes in, suffering the consequences, so I can start anew. If I do not face what I left behind, it will continue to seep out of the rooms I’ve placed it carefully in, preventing me from moving to the next chapter of my life.”

Hannibal opens his car door and Will opens his as well. Together, they step out. Hannibal approaches the gate and pulls out a key to the chains that hold them shut. Will is surprised that Hannibal even has a key. Hannibal lets the chains and lock fall to the ground. He looks at the crests that indicate it’s the Lecter Estate.

The crests are filthy, faded, and cracked. Hannibal touches one of them with his hand only for a moment before pushing the gates open, breaking twigs and vines that have gathered on them. He walks through and Will follows close behind.

It’s a decent walk before they reach any sort of building, which makes Will wonder why they didn’t just drive the car. After a short hike through wooded overgrowth, they approach a small cabin. Its roof is a faded orange and the walls a dirty white. The windows are covered in soot to the point where seeing through them is nearly impossible. For the most part, the cabin has held up fine.

Hannibal stands in front of the cabin and turns the knob slowly. The door opens with a loud creaking noise, not used to motion. As for the inside, it doesn't look like anything has been touched in decades. Layers of dust cover the ground, the furniture, and the walls. Hannibal takes a step inside and with each step, a footprint in the dust is left behind. Will follows in Hannibal's steps.

"It was a harsh winter that year. The country was still controlled by the Soviets. Soldiers began invading the town, and eventually, my home in order to seek shelter and food. My family— my father, mother, me, and Mischa— took shelter in this hunting cabin. A group of soldiers found the cabin and killed my father and mother in order to raid the building. They successfully did, but they soon ran out of food."

Will watches as Hannibal walks through the living room area, staring at the chairs near the fireplace.

"Mischa had gotten sick. As they took her outside, I remember her calling my name. They proceeded to murder her and cannibalize her. She was fed to me. I knew at the time what I was being fed, but I was hungry and I had to eat."

"What happened to the men?"

"A sudden collection of decapitations occurred, killing all the men who raided the cabin. They never caught the person who killed them."

Will begins to speak what sounds like an apology, so Hannibal cuts him off.

"You must understand, Will, nothing happened to me. I happened. Whether my family lived, I was destined to become what I am today. My fate is something I'm content with."

"Corridors," Will says.

"Precisely," Hannibal walks over to an animal head on the wall and pulls a locket from its mouth.

He puts the locket around his neck and tucks it under his shirt. He steps around Will and makes his way back to the door. Will follows him. Hannibal leads Will to a graveyard and to a specific grave, marked Mischa Lecter - *Mylima* .

"What does Mylima mean? You've called me something like that." Will asks.

" *Mylima* means loved, or beloved. I call you *Mylimasis* , which as well, means beloved when referring to a man."

Will lets out a small oh. Despite the sad atmosphere, Will feels some joy in his heart that he was bestowed the same title as Hannibal gave Mischa.

The gravestone somehow has remained pretty untouched by nature, besides a dirt coating. There's no cracks or fading of the engraving. Hannibal kneels down in front of the grave and mumbles something in his native tongue. He kisses the top of the stone and rises to his feet.

He faces Will and smiles, “Are you ready to walk back to the car?”

“We’re not going to the castle?”

“If you want to, we can. Though, I don’t particularly care to.”

“No, it’s fine. Just thought you would.”

Hannibal begins walking, taking Will’s hand into his own as he does. His demeanor is suddenly restored to his usual positive attitude. He looks at the castle, in the distance, as they walk.

“Well, after I was orphaned, the castle was converted into an orphanage. I stayed there for a few years, engaged in a period of muteness, so I had plenty of time to get my affairs in order with the rooms of my memory palace.”

“I bet mute Hannibal was a pleasure,” Will teases.

“You should try it sometime,” Hannibal claps back with a grin.

Will scoffs and breaks out into a short laugh.

The two return to the car and drive back into town. They go to one of the pubs and sit down at a corner table. Surprisingly, the pub is quite full. Will didn’t expect the social life of the town to be so lively. Hannibal orders their beer.

“What would you like to eat, Will?”

Will decides on the grilled fish and Hannibal gets a roast pork. When the food arrives, the two dig in and drink their beers. Ever since they walked back to the car, Hannibal has seemed more carefree and genuine than ever. There’s no mask, but it’s not a monstrous sight. It’s like he turned a page in the split of a second.

“How’s your corridor?” Will inquires while in between bites.

Hannibal smiles, “Well on its way to the second chapter.”

Hannibal’s smile is contagious as Will reflects it back at him. The two drink a couple of beers with their dinner, aiming for a slight, pleasurable buzz. After they’re done, Hannibal pays and they walk back to the inn. They only make it to the side of the pub before bursting into a fit of laughing and kissing. Will is backed up against the wall of the pub as Hannibal kisses him.

Hannibal takes a moment and looks at Will with endearing eyes, “Thank you for accompanying me on today’s excursion.”

“There’s nowhere I’d rather be.”

“My chapter two is surrounded around you, Will. Lead me wherever you’d like. As long as we’re together, I am content.”

“Well, I have to go pick up my dogs in Maine. That’s our first stop.”

“Sounds lovely. I’ll finally be able to rummage through your home as you did mine.”

“That’s on you. You wanted me to,” Will defends himself.

Hannibal smiles, “Yes, I did.”

Will gives Hannibal a small peck on the lips and looks up at him, “Let’s go back to the inn.”

Hannibal holds his hand and leads Will to the inn, “Any ideas on where to go after Maine?”

“I’ve heard Cuba is lovely this time of year.”

A pairing not entirely ideal for one another, brought together by an unexpected connection. The ability to understand each other after a life of solidarity. Despite frustrations, complications, and mutilations, the epiphany that the one needs the other occurred. A painful realization but necessary to avoid misery. Once fate was accepted, happiness filled the two’s lives, sealing their connection.

Chapter End Notes

If you’ve made it this far, I hope you enjoyed.

At times, I feel like their relationship made no sense. To be fair though, it didn’t in the show either. How are you in love with a killer who manipulated you? The question of the decade.

Anyway, I hope it was worth the time to read. Thank you for getting this far.

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